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# Shakugan no Shana Volume8

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These are the novel illustrations that were included in  
volume 8



しゃくがん  
灼眼のシャナⅧ

“教授”とドミノが企てた“実験”は、シャナによって失敗に終わった。

女子高生に戻ったシャナは、悠二と共に再び“日常”を暮らし始める。しかし、彼への抑えきれない『どうしようもない気持ち』を身の内に孕んだままの彼女は、揺れ動く感情に支配される自分自身に戸惑いを隠せなかった。

そして、シャナと悠二の前に新たな敵が立ちふさがる。

——立ちふさがるもの。それは「期末試験」という“日常”だった。

緒方真竹が提案した『みんなで一緒に勉強会』の行方は果たして……！

奇才・高橋弥七郎が放つ渾身の学園ストーリー第Ⅷ弾！

高橋 弥七郎  
イラスト  
いとうのいち





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イカすネコ拳を構える作者

 たかはし や しちろう  
**高橋弥七郎**

大阪人は今日も行く。豆ちしきその5ー。作者は、自著のサンプルを十冊も貰えるんやでー。届くのはだいたい月初めの一、二日あたりなんやー。自分は大体お世話になった人たちに郵送してるんやけど、修羅場が重なると、公式発売日より発送が遅れたりしてまうんやー（泣）。

【電撃文庫作品】

**A/Bエクストリーム CASE-314[エンペラー]****A/Bエクストリーム ニコラウスの仮面****アプラクサスの夢****灼眼のシャナ****灼眼のシャナⅡ****灼眼のシャナⅢ****灼眼のシャナⅣ****灼眼のシャナⅤ****灼眼のシャナⅥ****灼眼のシャナⅦ****灼眼のシャナⅧ****イラスト:いとうのいち**

なんだかすることが多くて、右耳で聞いたことが左耳から抜けてしまうような危機感を感じながら過ごしております。気が付くと夏ももう終わりですね……色々と精進せねば。

カバー／加藤製版印刷

# 灼眼のナナ九郎

高橋弥七郎  
イラスト／いとうのじち



Design・Yoshihiko Kamabe





「悠一と、誓おう」



「シャナは、それでいいの？」





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灼眼のオナガ

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Nobody even found out:

That there is something hidden within their everyday life. Even if they are sucked into it, they won't be aware of it.

From the world where 'we can never get to'—the 'Denizens' from the 'Crimson Realm' turns them into people who have never existed. And yet humans themselves are unaware of all these.

"Isn't there any other way?"

Sighing and shaking as he asks the question, the pitch black shadow-like thing standing in front of him answers :

"There is no other way."

The 'Crimson Denizens' use the 'Power of Existence' stolen from humans to freely trigger inconceivable phenomenons without thinking, never thinking about the consequences of their actions to this world. Because

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of the loss of something that ought to exist in the first place, distortions are formed. Even worse, some day, an unredeemable calamity will be caused in both worlds.

However, they continue to act as they wish, based on their emotions.

“Are we really powerless?”

The half-black shadow self answers again:

“It’s really impossible.”

Finally, a small group of ‘Crimson Lords’, who fears disaster, decide to take down their own fellowmen.

They let humans—those who found the existence of the ‘Crimson Denizens’ due to the loss of their loved ones, and who seek revenge—offer themselves as instruments of the ‘Crimson Lord’, in exchange of extraordinary power.

Just like this, the crusaders ‘Flame Hazes’ are formed.

“What should I do?”

This time, the pitch-black shadow self questions:

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“What do you want to do?”

Then, in order to run away from the Flame Hazes who sense the distortions due to loss of humans and chasing them, the ‘Crimson Denizens’ create a substitute called a ‘torch’ from the leftovers of the humans that were eaten. The torch will lose its purpose, place and sense of being as the remaining ‘Power of Existence’ runs out, before it finally disappears.

“What do you really want to do?”

The black self slowly approaches, and in return asks: “That’s right, what do you really wish to do, Sakai Yuji?”

As the bell suddenly rings, the dream vanishes.

## Chapter 1 - Farewell on the rainy day

The rain, which lasted throughout the night, falls as the patter of water can be heard.

Day dawns earlier in this summer morning, as under this thick fog and rain, is a gray world.

There's no sign of heat in the summer, as the tiny water droplets gather to form cold air, covering the entire residential area of Misaki City.

Somewhere here, a black umbrella and a red umbrella are walked in level, juxtaposing among this vapor.

“Shana, we left home late, how about we hasten?”

Under the black umbrella, Sakai Yuji addressed the bearer of red umbrella in level with his.

The boy who gives off a sense of being powerful from that ordinary temperament of his is wearing sportswear that's for training.

“Mn.”

From underneath the red umbrella the girl, Shana, responded simply.

As her stature's rather short, her expression at this moment is blocked by the umbrella, inscrutable. She's wearing a large T-shirt and short stockings, radiating a presence that's completely opposite of her cute get-up, not a hint of weakness in it.

Of course, she isn't human. She's the "Enpatsu Shakugan no Uchite" Flame Haze; here to hunt down the Denizens who are distorting this world.

At this moment, her umbrella moves advances.

Yuji immediately increases his pace and walks beside her.

“...”

“...”

Underneath the umbrellas, both of them glanced at each other, but without batting an eye, they continue to move forward in the rain.

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Normally, the two of them would use this time for morning training. However, they came out into the rain for a different reason today. As for why both of them are wearing sportswear, it's because Yuji's mother Chigusa told them to 'go out to train'.

"...Ahem..."

Yuuji unintentionally coughs.

Shana raises her umbrella and asks,

"What's the problem?"

"No, it's nothing."

"Really?"

After that, they stopped talking, and silence descends.

Ever since the events from two days before, both of them have kept an intricate distance between each other.

Though it isn't as serious as being awkward, it can't be said to be familiar.

They aren't quarreling.

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These two have been training together everyday, whether it's training on how to control the 'Sonzai no Chikara'-Power of Existence- at the Sakai's home's rooftop right before midnight, or training physically in the morning at the garden, really nothing has changed. Shana continues to eat and play at Yuji's house, being taken care of by Chigusa in all sorts of ways; this is still the same as before. They've been eating breakfast together as well (as yesterday, a Saturday, was a holiday, they had all three meals together). Occasionally, Shana would head into Yuji's room and bring along heavy books that belong to Yuji's father Kantaro, who's alone overseas due to work, and start to read them in a relishing manner, this hasn't changed.

However, besides the bare minimum of conversation, it can be said that both of them don't really have much to talk about.

It's as if there's an invisible wall between both of them, ending with them having nothing to say to each other.

“...”

Yuji stares at the screen of rain in front and sighs slightly.

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Shana seems to notice this, but doesn't say anything.

However, that's not due to the cold atmosphere surrounding them.

The place where he's going to, and what he's going to do are the real reasons why he's upset. Thinking about it

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(What should I say, what should I say.)

Sakai Yuji isn't human.

The 'real Sakai Yuji' was already attacked by one of the Denizens who attacked this city, having died because his 'Sonzai no Chikara' got swallowed. The 'current Sakai Yuji' is now a replacement torch that's created from his remains.

A torch is a tool that's used to contain the remaining Sonzai no Chikara, which will gradually run out and disappear without anyone knowing.

If a stone is thrown into water, there'll be a sound of a ripple, and someone will find out. If someone lets a stone

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slowly sink into the water, it can escape notice; such a person will unknowingly achieve this. The torch is a that'll fool the surroundings.

Sakai Yuji is one of them.

Idiot. By coincidence or design, there's a treasure tool hidden inside his body. It's the Crimson treasure tool, 'Reiji Maigo' -Midnight Lost Child-, which can intercede with time.

It's unknown where he got that treasure tool from. It has the ability to replenish the 'Sonzai no Chikara' at midnight, and it's a continuous mechanism. Because of this tool, Sakai Yuji won't vanish, but became a 'moving treasure stove' mystes. With his personality and existence still intact, Sakai Yuji is able to continue living on like an ordinary person.

(If, if I could meet everyone yesterday without having to prepare ourselves emotionally...)

However, the fact that he's the remnant of a deceased person hasn't changed. He is a breathing corpse, undead.

And his friends knew about it.

On that day...when a Crimson Lord attacked, his good friends and classmates Keisaku Satou and Eita Tanaka, and Yoshida Kazumi, who he harbored feelings for, found out about this, and he has no capacity to deny this outcome.

Satou and Tanaka have an extraordinary relationship with another Flame Haze, the 'Interpreter of Condolence' Margery Daw, so it's obvious that they'll meet.

However, Yoshida's the complete opposite. It was because she was manipulated and made used by another Flame Haze who's in the city, the 'Mobilizer of Ceremonial Equipment' Khamsin (At least this is what Yuji thinks).

Sakai Yuji is already dead, and is only a remnant in front of them—a fact he wouldn't want his family and friends to know, but yet this is revealed to his closest friends.

At that time, Yuji was really shocked that they discovered the truth, and regretted the choice that he made. Right now, he can clearly feel all the anger born by the reality that he's in now.

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However, the rage continues to pressure him. The more he suppresses the issue, the less time he has to be buried under these feelings, and it's the same for the three friends who knew the truth.

Together with the Flame Hazes, they ran full throttle to prevent the Crimson Lord from achieving his ends, and survived. Maybe due to the excitement and relief over the moment of victory, everyone calmed down.

After everything was done, everyone tried to think of an excuse to explain to Chigusa why Shana, who went into battle in the yukata, has it all tattered, and created quite the commotion. After a while, without realizing it, each of them walked home.

But then, it's been a day already. There's enough time for them to ponder about all that happened until now. Yuji's grudgingly head towards the gathering place where the friends who knew the truth are. They're there to send off the Flame Haze 'Mobilizer of Ceremonial Equipment' Khamsin, who's leaving this city this morning.

(Really, he's so irritating no matter what the situation ...)

---

Yuji curses the old Flame Haze who's about to leave.

“...Uu...”

Beside him, Shana sighs softly.

Sensing this slight realization that the Flame Haze made, Yuji asks, not realizing his own awareness,

“What's up?”

“Nothing.”

“Really?”

Shana replies with this short, simple answer, and became silent.

There's only the patter of the tiny raindrops hitting the umbrellas continuously, about the two of them.

Yuji glances at the girl. This seems to be the umpteenth time he done this ever since yesterday. Recently, he's starting to feel that he's beginning to understand the girl's thoughts. Even though it's just that little bit, he's still confident in it. Right now, his instincts tells him that the

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girl isn't angry or sad, nor is there a look of unhappiness or dissatisfaction on her face...what he feels now...is that she seems to be anxious about something, hesitating.

(It's about that, huh...)

In reality, Yuji already had a rough idea on why there's a divide between him and Shana, or more appropriately, the reason she became like this is due to what happened two days ago, so it's logical to guess in that direction.

At that time, Yoshida Kasumi confessed to him.

(—"I love Sakai-kun"—)

A thorough love confession.

But after knowing that he's a torch, she said this—

(—"Sakai-kun is a human"—)

Yuji would inadvertently be all self-satisfied everytime he remembers the two of them hugging each other.

“...”

The unkempt yukata and messy let out an enchanting presence.

The excited expression that's full of warmth and gentleness.

(...Should I call it pretty or sexy...)

The chests were also stuck together, and both of them seemed to be able to feel each other's heartbeats.

(How soft. There's also that scent of warmth.)

Falling in love with this scene and touch, getting confessed to by the girl who already knew of his true identity, how can his heart not waver—

At this moment, Shana seems to sense something as she asks, "What?"

"Eh!? No, nothing."

"...Is that so...how strange..."

Speaking of which, even though it's the same, the body temperature's completely different. Yuji feels that the lowly-raised umbrella's giving off a stare that'll make him nervous.

Trying to find an excuse for himself, Yuji could only think of that confession as the reason behind all this.

(Yoshida-san...thoroughly crushed the premises that I believed in.)

Up till now, Yuji always believed in the cruel fact that 'I'm no longer a human', and always felt that this can't be reverted. Having accepted this, he was ready to give up the real Sakai Yuji's ordinary life that can't be replaced. He even planned to leave his family and friends in the near future, to leave this Misaka City that he grew up in.

Truthfully, a mystes with the permanent mechanism that resides in his body 'Reiji Maigo' can't possibly exist among the people who fall sick and die. There's no other choice except to walk away from his current life, and his training with Shana is to get ready to leave anytime.

However—

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(Did I not disappear...?)

After realizing the full meaning of the words in Yoshida's confession, each word greatly hurts Yuji.

(No, it's not that. It's not like that at all...!)

Either that, or it means that he doesn't know what to do.

Right now, he can no longer go back to his old ordinary lifestyle, he can no longer live on as a human. Even though he understands this, he really has that burning desire to go back to that everyday life he lost—as he's dejected and hurt because he lost something precious that can't be gotten back, there's a sharp pain somewhere in his heart. However, he did swear to Shana that he'll work hard until the time when he leaves the city, and will not become her burden.

Including that pain just now, Yuji's unhappy with his own weakness.

(Did Shana notice me waver...?)

Yuji understands the feelings of Yoshida, who confessed to him, yet he couldn't reply.

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One reason was that it wasn't the time for him to say it, but a stronger reason's because he can't underestimate those sincere feelings in her words...good thing too—he didn't know what to say anyway, and she did not ask for an immediate reply.

But right now, he has to face her.

For some reason, she really respects the 'Mobilizer of Ceremonial Equipment' Khamsin, who's about to leave today (though to Yuji, he's not someone who should be treated like that). It seemed that when Yoshida was troubled, Khamsin gave her some advice. To the extremely polite Yoshida, this is something that she has to do.

After a few days, what expression will she show after having reflected on her own confession? If her feelings at that moment were just of impulse in a dangerous situation like those scenes in the movies, for himself, who's not a human—

(What expression will she show?)

Maybe she won't show any expression at all.

Maybe she'll look at him in a terrified manner.

Thinking about this, the heart that's supposed to have been prepared is now chilly and guilty.

But even so, he still feels that deep inside him, there's another him staring back at him.

(How should I treat myself?)

Should he hope for her to calmly accept this reality?

Or should he hope for her to treat him cruelly to end all his hopes?

He's not clear about it

(Unclear about this, huh...I seem to be like this most of the time.)

He kept saying to himself that he doesn't know what to do yet he continued to waver, and he couldn't see anything else.

It's because he's concealing everything that made Shana angry, frustrated and even cry.

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It was the same two days ago. He got a sincere confession from Yoshida, yet he couldn't reply.

(I'm really too much...even though I thought of changing...)

Once he's pressured, his mind will become abnormally clear, but it's completely useless in this aspect. He found it useless no matter how hard he tried.

Yuji can't hide this long sigh as he says this,

"I'm sorry."

"?"

He felt that Shana, who's beside him, seems to be looking at him in a shocked look. After a few steps, she seems like she's trying to use her umbrella to hide something as she spins the axle and says, "Never mind."

Just this sentence.

And after that, the silence begins again.

Instead of feeling delighted from being forgiven by Shana, Yuji's feeling extremely guilty and apologetic.

---

It's not just because of the comforting words that she said to him.

It's also because she's a Flame Haze who has the mission of exterminating crimson denizens, it's also because she didn't drag him away while ignoring his own will, also because she didn't do the cruel thing of dissecting him, a mystes, for the 'Reiji Maigo'. It's also because she stayed with him in this city before he got ready, and to prepare him by training with him every morning and night. He may be too insincere in contrast to the honesty she showed.

This is also a huge reason why he didn't impose himself and question her 'why must you maintain your distance from me'.

(...)

Besides, there's also another reason.

But regarding this—

(...How is it possible...)

He could only think this way.

He wanted to ask, but finds it a humiliation—and yet he's afraid that she'll say the answer out—and he's not sure of his own feelings—these are all reasons.

Shana's mindful that Yoshida Kazumi confessed to him.

(How is it possible...)

Yuji's mocking himself for getting too full of himself.

It's basically a delusion of a man, a part of human nature.

Truly, he'll be really happy if this were the case—maybe he's yearning for it, hoping—but he can't imagine her to be like this—he'll like to repeat this again. Even though he's thinking this way, he still feels that she's relying on him as if 'it's her mission', the 'comrade that she searched so long for'.

Two days ago, when Yoshida confessed to Yuji, she nearly questioned him.

(Sakai-kun, you and Shana...)

(Eh?)

---

(...No, it's nothing...)

It's a question he himself can't answer.

He himself doesn't know what kind of feeling it is, how is it different from the trust, respect, intimacy and shame he has to Shana. Maybe they're both the same.

(At what point can I call it 'love'?)

Yuji remembers what his good friend Ike Hayato said before.

(If you understood it, it wouldn't be so tough.)

He continued to rattle on about his complaints, yet he couldn't find an answer.

This time, in order not to allow Shana to hear it, he says deep within his heart.

"I'm sorry."

Shana again spins the axle of the umbrella.

On the day that's was diluted by the rain, the Mana river, which divides Misaki City into the settlement area and commercial area continue to splash against the riverbank with its muddy-colored body.

On the settlement side of the Daisetsu Bridge that's over the Mana river, Yuji and Shana are waiting for their companions who aren't here yet.

While walking silently just now, both of them subconsciously hasten their steps, and in the end, the already reached the gathering location before the time of arrival.

The riverbank, which was always used as a place to jog, is now completely empty no thanks to the rain. There aren't many cars on the roads that're flooded with mud as well. What they can only sense is the icy cold rain that forms a lonely world.

On each sides of the bridge, there's a clock that indicate the temperature and humidity.

"They aren't here yet, huh..."

Seeing Yuji say these words that anyone who's waiting will say, Shana doesn't responds. In fact, it's already the

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3rd time that he said this. Feeling that it's troublesome to answer him one by one, Shana merely looks at where the handrail is. Yuji isn't waiting for a reply at all, instead looking at where she's looking at.

It can be said that the Mana river is a large one.

Right now, on both sides of the river, there're all sorts of waste materials on the banks.

These are the remains of the 'Misago Festival' that happened two nights ago.

The second day of events that were supposed to be held, which is the cleaning up day, was halted as it started to rain in the morning. Almost all the materials except for anything fire-related were abandoned over there, forming a lonely scene that's completely different from what excitement that one would expect from a temple's festival.

Suddenly, a cheery voice destroyed the silence of the rain.

"HI~ Good morning!"

Holding the umbrella, the big guy Tanaka Eita said hello cheerfully.

“Eh?”

Besides him, Keisaku Satou, who's holding an umbrella and can barely be called a 'bishounen', reveals a surprised look.

“What's with that get-up of yours, Sakai?”

Since it's Sunday morning, they're naturally wearing plainclothes. On being questioned, Yuji replies, “Ah, this? This is our training get-up.”

After answering that per usual.

(--)

It can be said that there's a sudden surge of gratitude.

“Oh, I don't know what to say about that, but it sure looks strong.”

“Well, if the ability did improve, you can tell from the momentum, right, onee-san? Eh?”

---

Focusing his narrow and long eyes behind, Tanaka finds that the person he thought was behind isn't there. Keisaku also turns back to look at the commercial street.

“That's strange. She was behind us just now, right?”

(—Ah!)

Yuji hasn't imagined it before.

He's not shocked by his friends as-per-normal attitude.

Regarding this, he had already hoped many times that 'it will be like this', as if he's flirting with it. What he didn't expect is for his own heart to be so grateful.

As for how they will treat him, whether it's the intention or the feelings, that's up to him to guess. To slowly become happy and peaceful, all these don't matter. The fact that they treated him like usual created a strong feeling within Yuji. In this rain, he lowers his teary eyes that're expressing their own emotions, and hides his awkward expression under the umbrella.

Beside him, Shana still doesn't say anything.

“Ah, you're finally here, Margery-san.”

---

“Onee-san, where did you go?”

Keisaku and Tanaka both called out at the lady who finally appeared with different honorifics.

In the middle of the road and the two pedestrian paths , a tall woman moving over here with uneven steps. That elegantly designed umbrella leans on the shoulder as the person with the lazy looking beautiful face steps forward , giving an irritated look as she says, “Ah, really, you’re too noisy. Didn’t I tell you that I’m always dazed in the morning?”

This angry looking beauty is using her hand to randomly bundle her silky hair up. She’s one of the Flame Hazes whom Crimson Denizens fear, the ‘Interpreter of Condolence’ Margery Daw.

“How cruel.”

This high-pitched laughing voice came from the other side of the umbrella, a huge book that’s attached to a strap, hung on the right shoulder and tucked underneath the right armpit.

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“Always drinking till late in the night, and you dare to say that you have no energy when you wake up, WAH!!?”

BAM...

“Didn’t I tell you that it’s so noisy?”

And the book that got hit by her is the Crimson Lord that gave her this abnormal power—‘Claw and Fangs of Violation’ Marchosias, who expresses his will through the ‘Grimoire’.

“I just went off to buy a can of coffee from the vending machine over there.”

Looking rather unhappy, Margery pulls out the coffee that was hidden behind the ‘grimoire’ and opens it agilely with one hand.

Seeing the busty woman gulp down the coffee, as a Flame Haze, Shana looks serious as she says,

“How’s the handling of things?”

“—Ah—”

While she asked, Margery has already finished the can of coffee, and her dreamy gaze eyes peer through the rimless spectacles as she looks at the sky. Several seconds later, she shakes the empty can with her fingertips and says simply,

“I contacted Outlaw already. They should be handling all these within a few days.”

“—Hohoho.”

Marchosias laughed ridiculously.

“What now?”

The black gem that’s surrounded by a gold chain is dangling in front of Shana’s chest as a thunder-like rumbling voice inquired from it.

Like Marchosias and Margery, that’s the Crimson Lord whom Shana is bound to, ‘Flame of Heavens’ Alastor.

Facing that deep voice, Marchosias doesn’t mind as he continues to use that sinister laughter.

“Hoho, nothing, nothing at all.”

“...”

Alastor, who doesn't get along with that light-hearted Lord since the beginning, doesn't continue on.

Facing Alastor, this Crimson Lord who's with Shana, Keisaku and Tanaka, who only knew of his existence two days prior, inadvertently let out a fearful look, and says,

“But places like the train station have already become like that. How about we pretend not to know anything?”

“We just went to the train station to check yesterday, there were a whole lot of reporters buzzing around, and all the repair workers and whatsoever were in a frenzy—”

Hearing their words, Shana merely snorts and replies,

“The truth won't be known. Those responsible for cleaning up the mess just need to think of some reason and leave some evidence, everyone will immediately calm down.

“Is that so...”

For some reason, Yuji responded like usual.

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Shana responded to this, but acted as per usual and responds,

“That’s the case.”

“...”

Alastor continues to remain silent in front of her chest.

Margery hasn’t found out about the delicate situation between those three (and even if she realizes it, it’s likely that she won’t care), as she turns back to look at the misty opposite behind her.

“However, it’s not often that we can see such destruction outside a fuzetsu, so those guys will have to tough it out for quite a while. We’re really lucky that no one was dead.”

“Yeah. The train station was almost completely wrecked. Those high railtracks have to be rebuilt, and the debris of the watchboard is all over the place. Quite a few street lights were wrecked as well. It’s already lucky that only a few people were hurt, maybe even a miracle. Hoho—”

---

Marchosias laughed as if it doesn’t involve him.

Like Margery, everyone turned to look at the other side of the road, at the Misaki Train Station that's being covered by the screen of rain.

What happened two days ago...this is different from the battles against Crimson Lords up till now, it's a special attack.

Normally, Flame Hazes and Crimson Denizens will only fight within isolated places called 'fūzetsus'. That dome-shaped space can seal the inside world from the outside and is used for concealing. Recently, the actions of the Crimson Denizens and the Flame Hazes have disappeared before the living, and up till now, no one realized anything, and it's all because of this invention.

The only people who can move freely within the fūzetsus are the people related to the Crimson Realm, and anyone else or anything that's unrelated will be isolated from the outside world and rendered in a stationary state. The people involved in this won't remember what happened, and even if the Crimson Denizens have eaten them, they won't realize a thing.

And there's another use of the fūzetsu—to hide the truth.

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In this Jizaihō supported space, anyone and anything can be restored back to what happened before the sealed off world, and as long as a certain level of Power of Existence is used, they can easily repair the destroyed parts back to the original state. This is also a large reason why the Crimson Denizens would continue to destroy and feast on humans in the human realm.

And they did not use this fūzetsu in the battle two days ago.

More accurately, they couldn't use it because of the interference of the Crimson Lord's contraption. In the end, Misaki City couldn't expect a repair of the unprotected state, and became a battlestage.

Most notably, the Misaka Train Station which was used as the control center of the Crimson Lord was severely decimated by the Flame Haze's combined attacks. The tall beam supporting the station is nearly completely destroyed, and there're a large number of fragments of the decorations of the Misago Festival and adverts bulletins scattered all over the road. The surrounding road lights seem to have completely scrapped, and the front of the station that was where the explosion occurred was completely annihilated.

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At this moment.

“Hm—?”

“Are they here?”

Marchosias and Alastor separately reported.

On the other side of the screen of rain, they're staring at a small figure that's appearing from the commercial side and is gradually growing bigger. It's a boy who's still wearing a thick raincoat even in this hot summer.

“Ah, sorry for making you guys come over this early.”

The youthful voice is slightly high-pitched, but without the sweetness of a kid. The voice came from underneath the low-covered cap, and this boy who looks even younger than Shana. One can tell that this person doesn't trust anyone, as the skinny frame of his has a large rod that's much taller than him and tightly wrapped in cloth, which is hung behind his right shoulder. That heavy looking rod, when combined with the boy's overwhelming and steady Power of Existence, gives off an inexplicable harmony.

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“Ah, sorry to keep you waiting.”

An old man’s voice can be heard from the bracelet of beads on the boy’s left wrist.

“Well, even though we say that, we did arrive on time  
—”

The boy peers at the clock beside him from under his cap.

His name is ‘Mobilizer of Ceremonial Equipment’ Khamsin Nbh’w, and the bracelet of glass beads on his left wrist ‘Sabia’ expresses the will of the Crimson Lord ‘Steadfast Sharp Peak’ Behemoth, who manages one of the oldest Flame Haze that extends to ages.

“Mm...that’s right...eh, isn’t that Missy here yet?”

Now that he mentioned it, everyone noticed it.

The girl Khamsin and Behemoth call ‘Missy’, Yoshida Kazumi isn’t here yet.

Looking at the time now, there’s still 2 minutes till the designated time.

This person always makes sure to be courteous and pays more attention better than anyone, so it's hard to imagine her being late for an appointment.

(Yoshida-san's still...)

Yuji thought of a reason why she's still not here yet, and it's a bit too much to think about it—it was just an impulse of affection when she confessed to him, and after recovering, she feels that it'll be extremely awkward to face him—thus, he starts to feel a little guilty, even self-loathing.

Keisaku and Tanaka don't know whether they should comfort him while acting like they don't know anything or to remain silent.

Shana feels a corrupted sense of comfort in her heart as she stiffens her face.

Suddenly, a voice comes from the air that's hitting hard on the umbrella harder than the rain—

“So, sorry for being late!” The gentle and clear voice broke the silence.

---

With the sound of water being stepped on, the square-patterned umbrella comes fluttering over from opposite where Khamsin came from.

That umbrella collapses when it arrived in front of everyone.

The girl underneath the umbrella catches her breath as she tries to control her erratic breathing. She then straightens her back as says hello to everyone,

“Good morning everyone!”

“Good, good morning—”

Yuji revealed a bothered look,

“Good morning.”

“Good morning, it sure is rare for Yoshida-san to actually arrive so close to the time.”

Keisaku and Tanaka heaved a sigh of relief.

“Mn, good morning.”

However, Shana's looking rather complicated.

The friends are confirming how each other is looking right now.

Seeing Yuji, Tanaka, Keisaku and Shana, Yoshida's expression is giving off the feeling of spring in the midst of this rain.

She greets everyone, and on the other side of the hand that's holding the umbrella, her left hand's holding onto a waterproof plastic bag.

“So, sorry—my mum kept this last night...searched for it for so long, that's why I ended up coming here so late ...”

Panting slightly as she's smiling, Yoshida doesn't look like she's forcing a face. It's unknown whether it's because this is of a natural feeling, but it feels like she's different from the one a while back who's normally hiding in a corner.

It's unknown whether Khamsin noticed the girl's change as he slightly nods his head and replies.

“Ah, no problems, as for the time...”

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“Ho, just right on time.”

Khamsin lifts his head up, and both of them look at the clock. The numbers indicate that she just made it.

“But Mr Khamsin, you...”

“?”

“If I was late, you wouldn’t have waited for me, right?”

“...”

Seeing the girl who understands him smile, Khamsin is stunned. To him, who lacks the expressiveness of emotions, that must be quite a look of shock.

Behemoth just chuckles and gives an ambiguous answer.

Facing the two of them, Yoshida Kazumi reveals a slight, gentle smile as she raises the bag in her hand. There seem to be Arabic numbers printed all over what looks like a brand logo, and it sure looks classy.

“It’s unexpected that I finally managed to ask you to leave a day later...so I feel that if I don’t hand this over to you...”

At first, Khamsin and Behemoth intended to leave Misaki City the day after the incident happened, which was yesterday.

However, Yoshida requested for them to ‘stay for one more day’. Seems like this plastic bag has a parting gift for those two who’re leaving, and this is to be expected of her attentiveness.

“Considering your jobs, I don’t know whether I should stop you...”

Khamsin and Behemoth are special Flame Haze ‘tuners’ who correct the damage done to the world by the Crimson Denizens. And because of this mission, they came to Misaki City.

Once there’s a place with a large number of humans devoured by the Crimson Denizens, the world’s distortion will drastically increase. Their job is to head to those areas afflicted with the problem and correct it with the help of people who stayed there for a long time. (

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More accurately, the tuners are just doing this of their own free will)

“Ah, please don’t worry about that. We intended to make a detour and check if there’s any negative consequences after what happened during that big incident anyway.”

“Hoho, we also had the rare opportunity to investigate thoroughly. We really have to thank you. Basically, it’s not often to have something like this.”

Yoshida was requested to help out in the tuning, and basically, it’s providing the necessary image for them to use when they correct things. And while working, she ended up knowing of Yuji and Shana’s real identities and the Crimson Denizens ravaging this world without restraint.

Of course, she was affected deeply, and even experienced great fear. However, after what happened two days ago, she didn’t loathe about this, and is really grateful to Khamsin and Behemoth, these powerful people, for giving her the courage to move forward and to live her life seriously.

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She reaches her hand out and gives them the token of appreciation.

“This isn’t anything really valuable.”

Khamsin merely nods his head in appreciation.

“Thanks.”

The waterproofed bag feels a lot lighter than what the large size implies.

In order to confirm what’s inside, Behemoth asks,

“Can we open it now?”

“Yes please.”

Yoshida quickly replies as she uses her own umbrella to shield the bag from above and leans closer.

Khamsin again stares at this gentle girl’s face, nods his head in appreciation and opens the bag.

While everyone’s watching silently, what he took out is a straw hat. The hat itself is rather broad, and there’s

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only a sky-blue ribbon as decoration. The design is extremely simple, and it's suitable for the boyish Khamsin to wear.

“In this hot summer, it may be too much to wear that cap you were wearing. This should be appropriate.”

Khamsin receives the hat, stares at it for a few seconds, take a few steps back and then says,

‘Thank you very much. I'll treasure it dearly.’

Seeing him bow deeply, Yoshida immediately waves her hands and says,

“No, compared to what you did to help me, this is nothing...”

And then, as if to hide her embarrassment, she looks up into the sky and smiles,

“And today's raining. I really couldn't be up to date.”

“Mn.”

Behemoth seems to reply to Yoshida, and yet also seems to respond together with his contractor.

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Standing up straight, Khamsin takes off the hood of the raincoat, and the hair that's tied in a ponytail. The brown face that's carved with numerous scars reveals itself under the rain. In regards to this old Flame Haze who doesn't do extra things, probably has no sense of human compassion at all and only exists for his mission, Margery and Marchosias are secretly surprised. Khamsin ignores their looks as he puts the hat on.

“How does it look, Missy?”

“Hoho, doesn't it look a bit manly?”

The large straw hat that's slightly lowered covers the scars on his face nicely.

“Yes, it's cute—no, cool!”

Yoshida touches her face as she corrects what she said, adding extra force into the corrected words.

Khamsin doesn't smile at her reply, instead merely nodding his head slightly. Then, as if wondering how he should wear it, he continues to adjust the hat. Seeing him like this, it seems that his age matches his looks.

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However, his real nature is completely different. As the oldest Flame Haze, after the boy adjusted the hat, he says to the pendant that's hanging in front of Shana's chest.

"Ahh, Flame of Heavens, we intend to hang around the nearby places and investigate the actions of the Denizen organization that's headed by Bal Masqué."

"Mm, because we have a bad feeling about this...we'll contact you if there's anything unusual."

Alastor says with a heavy tone,

"We'll leave it to you then, because we may be unable to leave this place for a while."

The old Flame Haze nods his head slightly.

Then, he turns to Keisaku and Tanaka, and says,

"Hm, according to what I know, there are only a few cases of humans who fight alongside Flame Hazes..."

---

Having the passionate wish of ‘travelling around the world with Margery, living strongly together and making out a career’, the two boys are definitely shocked now that a single sentence broke through their core.

“—However, to breed friendship to such an extent that both sides love each other, there are many of them. Of course, one has to be ready for the eventual farewell, but this is the same for all humans.”

“Oi, stop stirring up trouble here, will you!?”

Seeing them look rather bemused, Margery lashed out at them,

Behemoth then says in a rather to-be-expected tone.

“Hm, a fact is a fact. And even if they know this, the challenges they face won’t change.”

“Heh, stop trying to slip away. Old geezers who’re about to slip away really have it easy, huh?”

Marchosias lets out a rare angry scolding. Of course, he objected for the sake of the boys’ wishes, even though they’re overestimating themselves.

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Of course, the old Flame Haze doesn't waver. He turns to Yuji and Shana. The brown eyes stare at them from underneath the hat.

"Hm, since a large organization like Bal Masqué knows where the 'Reiji Maigo', whether to stay here or to leave here, this problem can't be debated..."

Both of them didn't reply, remaining silent.

What happened two days ago left a huge scar—the massive amount of destruction to all the stations and construction buildings and the people who were actually hurt—a completely unorthodox version that only time knows.

Even so, nobody really remembers what happened.

This is because the mastermind behind the incident—the Crimson Lord set up a mechanism which interfered with Khamsin's tuning, causing a side effect.

When the events start to happen, there was a 'calm wave' energy that caused people to accept the phenomenon as it were natural, until they end up in a stage where 'they accept everything without knowing'.

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Once they enter that stage, they will temporarily stop reacting to the events and things that are in front of them.

To these people, what happens when they reverted back to normal was that the train station was completely trashed, and there are indications of damage all over the city. In that situation, even if an investigation is to be carried out, they can't get any testimony from anyone.

In fact, before they lost consciousness, when the battle was at the beginning, they did witness Shana and Margery flying about in the air and the flames that surrounded them. However, nobody said that out because of the influence of the 'calm wave' that made them think that this was 'natural'. If—

"Did you see that girl with the burning wings in the air?"

If someone were to ask a question like this, the response would be—

"Ya, I saw her. So what?"

That will be the most probable response.

The witnesses would have treated this as an ordinary scene.

Many have actually experienced it before, but they never spread the news around completely because of this. Of course, humans can't investigate on the state of destruction.

The current state of Misaki City is such that rumors are flying all over the place, and the media's adding fuel to the fire, causing lots and lots of rumors.

All these were just a lucky coincidence that occurred through the mechanism that the Crimson Lord put on Khamsin and Behemoth's tuning. In fact, everyone who was involved in the fight—forget about Shana and Margery, even Yuji and Yoshida—in the final counterattack, to a certain extent, they already thought about giving up hope already.

It was merely luck that nothing happened the last time

Nobody can guarantee that they'll be safe the next time.

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“Hm, perhaps the battle two days ago may have caused an emotional shock and physical damage that's so minute it can be controllable, or maybe it was just a coincidence. You better remember this.”

Yuji seems like he's pouting as replies the tuners who proclaimed this fact without mercy.

“If you're talking about fighting carefully, I know that.”

And Shana merely responds with a ‘humph’.

Just like that, they finished what they wanted to say. Khamsin straightens his body, turns around and faces the last person he's saying goodbye to—Yoshida Kazumi.

In this drizzle, everyone remain silent unanimously.

The one who broke this silence is Yoshida, who couldn't do this in this past.

“Mr Khamsin, here.”

She said this as she pulls out something small from her pocket.

It's a small cute package wrapped in a paper bag.

"This is the 'Jettatura' you lent me the last time. I'm returning it back to you. I dirtied it quite a bit, so I wiped it clean after that."

Underneath the straw hat, Khamsin nods his head and receives this monocle that allowed this girl to 'see the truth to this world' and keeps it.

Then, as if it's a farewell ritual, the old Flame Haze says,

"Mm...goodbye."

"Mmm, let's go."

They weren't saying this to anyone else, just to each other.

"..."

Yoshida also feels it.

The time to separate has arrived.

Khamsin carefully puts the straw hat that Yoshida gave him, and then like just now, puts on his raincoat hood. He then takes one step away from the girl's umbrella.

Having left the umbrella, he starts to get baptized by the rain. Both of them say,

“Hm, most likely, you don't need any suggestions now, but let's hope that we never meet again.”

“Hmm, and we'll pray that you'll continue to live happily here.”

The Flame Haze 'Mobilizer of Ceremonial Equipment', who share a common body, finally say in unison.

“““Thank you, Miss 'Yoshida Kazumi'. ”””

“!!!...No need to thank me.”

Yoshida clearly sees that in a corner of the drenched hood, the boy is showing a smile.

## Interlude 1 - The return of the aide

With a detailed and heavy sound, a large stone door is shut.

The floor of this palace is like a pitch black crystal, showing the figures of the 3 people who returned.

Soon after, in the space that can only be described as 'transparent darkness', the silver dew that's dancing in the air forms the figure of the surrounding objects...and arrange themselves as 2 rows of pillars on each side of a palace.

The trio are walking down the corridor that's full of a fantasical atmosphere, whether it's the ceiling or the walls.

"Don't you miss being in the 'Seireidan' after so many years, Professor?"

The woman's who's walking in front elegantly said as she doesn't turn back.

The grey tightfitting dress looks like it's about to merge itself into the darkness, as it forms a fresh contrast to the bewitching snowy white skin that appears from

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within the darkness. It's a young woman with all sorts of decorations all over her. Among them, the most noticeable is the long thin chain that extends from around the shoulders to the elbow.

The woman has an eyepatch over her right eye.

But one can still see her two eyes.

In other words, she has three eyes.

The forehead and left side are showing golden irises which move to the left, as if they're prompting a reply that hasn't arrived yet.

The 'Professor' who's walking behind the woman reveals a reluctant look as he says in an uninterested tone

"I have no such ha~bit of recalling the pa~st."

It's a tall and skinny man who's wearing an ankle-length white coat. His footsteps are as light as a twig on the ground.

"If~nothing has changed, there's~no value in coming to see."

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Having staked everything on research and inventing, he does not have any feelings of remembrance. The sharp eyes that are always curious are right now hidden behind the glass-bottle-base thick glasses.

He uses one hand to scratch the hair that's strapped with a belt weakly, and uses the other hand to play with the gadgets hanging on his neck, as he seems uninterested in the question.

At this moment, a 3rd person with a metallic kling klang footstep sound says,

“But Professor--”

That's an object that's more than 2m tall. The body that's as round as a gas canister has tubes and cables attached to it as limbs.

“The Silver Sand corridor is just a corridor. How can it get better anyway, ibs burps ibs burps ibs burps (it hurts it hurts it hurts!!”

There's a strand of hair on the head, and there are two gears below that act as eyes. The object that is designed like a head...and the cheeks are being pinched by the mechanical pincer of the Professor.

The Professor just turns his body back as he continues to pinch his servant, saying.

"Do~mi~no!, if I~continue to stay here, many~changes ~may occur? Can~ you be considered my~assistant?"

The Crimson Denizen servant called Domino—Rinne continues to use its hands to rub the face that got released as it says to the Professor who turns around,

"Didn't you say that you won't take it back? Ibs burps ibs burps (it hurts it hurts)"

"Do~mi~no~, you seem to lack a flex~ible mind when doing re~search." "Welcome back, your excellency 'Arbiter of Reverse Reasoning' Bel Peol."

As an unknown voice rings, a flash of white light erases all the darkness on the corridor. It's unknown when they started, but the trio are already gathered in a corner of the unpleasant looking semicircle room.

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In front of them is a man, who's bowing deeply to the woman in the lead.

The man has a set of bat wings behind him and a long thin tail. The fingernails of the right hand that's placed in front of his chest is abnormally long, and between the hair, one can see the sharp ears and horns. There's also a large scythe that's nailed onto a sturdy belt and hanging down.

That's a rare image of an ancient demon, but--

"The withdrawing of the palace bridge is complete.  
The Seireiden will revert back to regular migration mode.  
"

The moment he lifts his bent body up, what appears is a real, miniature looking middle-aged man. His eyes are narrowed, and combined with the droopy eyelids, it makes the face look like it was chiseled out from a piece of wood. Also the fringe that's parted down the forehead will make people pity and worry about him. However, if one looks closer, they'll find that he's wearing a really ordinary Western outfit, which really doesn't go along with the items on him.

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Suddenly, he reveals a shocked expression.

"Woah! Seeking Researcher-sama?"

"N~nnn, it's~been a while, Fecor~"

The Professor retains his upper body posture as he merely turns his head back in front, smiling as he said that.

Behind him, Domino drags its large body forward and greets,

"Hello, it's been a while, Rantei-sama."

The three-eyed woman in front, Bel Peol ignores the extremely surprised Fecor as she walks towards the middle of this semicircle room, and the ornaments draped all over her body continue to rattle as they clash. At the base of that bowl-shaped stairs, there's someone burning inside a bowl with black smoke coming out of it, and it's stuffed full with ash. She notices that the furnace is slightly different from usual, as the rod and spear that were supposed to be there aren't around. Without turning back, she says to the back."

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"Fecor, it seems like Trigon and Shintetsu Nyoi are missing?"

Being questioned, Fecor jumps up like a bullet as he stands up straight, trembling as he explains this situation that rarely occurred,

"Yes! Because the two excellencies...went out to do something..."

"Both of them went out?"

"Yes, the General went out 6 days ago, and the Priestess left 3 days ago. Both excellencies said that they had to carry out royal commands when they left."

It's true that the treasure tools that were inserted into the giant bowl 'Gehinnom' can only be used when they're on their missions. But either way, it's still an unbelievable thing to Bel Peol.

One of them is the general that hardly steps into the Seireiden, the transformer 'Sydonay', the other is the witch (called a Priestess) who hardly even takes missions , 'Master Throne' Hecate.

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(Hm, maybe this is the indication that something big is about to happen) The duo, together with the strategist, 'Arbiter of Reverse Reasoning' Bel Peol, form the 'Trinity', the highest order of the largest Crimson Denizen organisation Bal Masque that the world so fears. Never in the hundreds of years of history had the trio moved out at the same time.

(But then, there's still the Reiji Maigo...seems like it's the correct decision to bring the Professor back.)

However, Bel Peol didn't reveal this look of surprise on her face.

(Let's wait for Hecate to come back first, and then see if we have any clues before planning on.)

She continues to think as she waves her left hand slightly.

The chain that wraps around her shoulders to the arms flows with the movement and floats towards the bowl. It then forms a spiral around the bowl that's filled with ash and floats over it.

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After a while, when this is finally over, she finally turns around.

"Fe~co~orr, my research lab should~ be left~ intact, right?"

"Yes, yes, of course, Seeking Researcher-sama."

Fecor says to the Professor who staring at him with a terrifying expression.

"Yare yare, and I intended to keep Hecate happy by not telling her that you're coming back. To think that she went out, what a pity."

"Hm~Hecate? Hm...who's~that?"

Keeping his upper body backwards, the Professor tilts his head as he tries to recall. He's not pretending, but giving a serious look.

Behind him, Domino walks to him and says to his ear.

"Professor, it's the Priestess-sama who blows the flute. Didn't you help her modify the flute 16 times? UWAH ibp burps ibp burps (it hurts it hurts)!"

---

"I~know that without you~telling me that."

While leaning back, the Professor starts to pinch Domino, who's behind him. His other hand is making a puzzled action--(putting his palm on his foreheard) as he continues to search for the location of his forehead while he searches the back of his head.

"Bu~to think that the child will have~moments where she'll go out. This~is the first time I knew of it."

"The 'Mystic Sacred room' that surrounds this Seireiden will prevent that child from displaying her power. I even got guests to come here, what a waste. But at least she will be back...ah, yes."

Backing away a few steps from the Professor and sighing, the bitter looking Crimson Lord questions again.

"Fecor, has Sabrac came back?"

Fecor spends several seconds recalling before answering,

"Well, those jaegers and wanderers who stopped by to report have no news of him."

"Really? When I met him on the way, I even told him to go onto the paths and the rest points...maybe he still has something to do on the East coast."

"Humph, that guy..."

"Hua--" with the exhaust of steam, Domino muttered.

Bel Peol is rather surprised to see the Rinne who's normally so mild in nature and often shows respect to other Crimson Denizens (and some who are as crude and rude as its creator) actually angry, since it's so rare.

(Speaking of which...)

Sabrac was rather angry as well when she met him. Though the guy himself loves to make a fuss, for him to get really angry is a once in a blue moon situation.

"Professor, what in the world did you do to Sabrac?"

Being questioned, the Professor snorts.

"I~didn't do any~thing, it's that~obstinate~guy~..."

The Professor, who has his upper body kept down except for the head, lowers his face.

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Fecor seems to be interested as he pricks his ears, while Domino takes a step back."

"--HUMILIATED IT AS A 'CRA~ZY CONTRAPTION!!!"

Still keeping his upper body back, the Professor's arms start to move. As Domino just took a step back, the Professor got Fecor.

"--Ow..."

"Professor, that's my subordinate."

Being lectured by Bel Peol like this, the Professor finally realises that he's pinching something else. His head turns in the opposite direction and growls,

"Do~mi~no--! You actually caused trouble for outsiders, can you be considered by assistant?"

"Uu--! Im sorbet Im sorbet (I'm sorry I'm sorry)!!"

Seeing the Professor pinch Domino on the face again, Bel Peol can only sigh, and say,

"Then, why was Sabrac so angry?"

"Hm--I don't understand at all. I just modified that guy's antique with a powerful and cool-looking upgrade, and then that guy just exploded. Domino, you should still have that, right?"

The Professor smirks mysteriously as he orders his subordinate.

Domino strokes its face as it opens the round gas-canister like stomach.

"It hurts, okay, please hold on...---mm..."

"The uberpowerful and cool looking antique...oh, got it, it's here!"

It pulls out a sword from the pile of mechanical parts.

It's a Western style two-handed sword. Basically, one can feel the supreme artistic scene and the unique flavour of the sword compressed into it, and it's easy to tell that this is a rather impressive and famed blade.

Domino easily raises it over the head and presses the 'button' on the hilt..."Ho'

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**CRAK CRAK CRAK---!!**

At this moment, the blade starts to spin.

Just as the Professor is thoroughly immersed in his own technological creation, Bel Peol asks in order to confirm it,

"What's this?"

The Professort spins his upper body by half a round and lifts it back up, and then proudly and loudly declares,

"This is a drill."

"A drill?"

The Professor is gleeing as he proudly opens his arms wide and answers,

"Yes! This is my romantic creation, THE DRI~ILL!!"

**CRAK CRAK CRAK--**

As if trying to compete with the Professor's volume,  
the sound of the blade spinning echoes throughout the  
centre of the Seireiden.

## Chapter 2--That Day

It's not just the students of Misaki High School; anyone who's a student will have to face a certain regular trial that can't be avoided.

It's called 'exams', the cognitive assessment that is done through writing. To put it a bit radically, the school is set up to give these kinds of tests, or forcefully (though it may be a different reason for the students.)

The rain ended today, and it's now Monday afternoon.

Within Misaki High Year 1 Class 2, it's louder than ever, and like usual, a group of 6 people are eating their meals.

"I heard that they had more time to prepare for the exams a few years back."

Every year in Misaki High, they would have an exam on the week after the Misago Festival (It's said that the city committee will consider about this and will discuss the time with the county education branch).

And this year, it's held on the Monday. Including the supplementary lessons before the exams, they will have

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exams on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Friday and Saturday will be their rest days, and on next Monday , they will get their results and the student reports before holding the first school dismissal ceremony. To the students, with such an arrangement, the rest days are already the start of summer holidays.

"I heard that the rest days are longer this time, but the standard seems to change every year. And with all the double holidays and all sorts of reasons, all the lesson plans and schedules were all messed up.

This person who's giving quite the speech is the savior of class 1-2--the megane weirdo Ike Hayato.

"But then again, no matter how much changed, we students can only follow the schedules the higher ups give us."

After saying that, he picks up a piece of meat from the food container and stuffs it into his mouth.

The other five--Yuji Sakai, Shana, Yoshida Kazumi, Keisaku Satou and Tanaka Eita continue to talk about what they know and their interests.

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Right now, the entire class (or rather, the entire school) is talking about the 'rumors' about the mysterious event that happened during the Misago Festival 3 days ago. Even now, there are people discussing such news:

"It's said that someone took a photo of that weird train at Hakurei station by handphone---"

Some people are using gestures to explain the situation

,

"I was there before. It was really crazy--"

Some of them even chatted excitedly about what they saw the first time,

"Ah, that billboard at the plaza in front of the station was burned so badly, it felt like there were vandals here--"

Some people even treated it like a lunch topic as they continue to make a ruckus,

"There were many people there, reporters, cameramen, I even got interviewed--"

Some even express shock at the change to their city,

"The cross junction in front of the station can't be used because they have to repair it, so the roads are now temporary pathways--"

"I don't know which restaurant even moved their tables and chair out to make an open-air business."

And the people who are worrying about the hassles of reality,

"Well, there're a lot of people from other places who came to look--"

"I heard that Misaki City Station can't be repaired completely in the summer. That's a disaster--"

Seems like these scenarios that happened without a cause are easier to talk about through lunch. Just looking at class 1-2 alone, there are numerous topics revolving around this alone.

But right now, only the 6 people here are talking about something else.

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Or rather, 5 out of the 6 people here know about the truth, so they didn't havout this. There isn't any intentions to talk about it, and the reason why they decided to ask Ike Hayato about all sorts of things is because to them, the current biggest problem is the 'hardest end-of-term exams' now, rather than the past event of 'a Crimson Lord who got Misaki City involved in a battle'.

At this moment, Tanaka, who's munching onto the onigiri he bought from the convenience shop, grumbles,

"I just asked the sports uncle, and he said that the exam rest period used to be a week. I'm so envious."

"But wouldn't we need a Saturday to make up for the lesson time? I don't want that."

Satou said that as he holds a bitten yakisoba bread with one hand.

"But even if we reduce the lesson time, the lesson content will still be a lot. Wouldn't we and the teachers end up having a headache?"

From the gaze and some light movements, Yuji realises that Yoshida's talking to him, and replies,

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"Ya, don't know who came up with that. And I find that the rest period before the school dismissal ceremony is a waste. I rather have everything done within 2 or 3 days and let them give us summer holiday earlier."

Shana immediately refutes his view,

"Well, the students will find that there won't be time to revise if all the exams are packed together. And the teachers will find that there's not enough time to grade the student's papers. So it's not beneficial either way--"

After that, she--well, according to her, 'gobbles' it up--stuffs the melon bread into her mouth.

"...Even so..."

Almost agreeing with Yuji, who sounded like a voice for the students, Satou and Tanaka frantically shifted over to Shana's side.

"That's right, that's right."

"Really, you guys, stop talking nonsense!"

Seeing them act according to momentum, Ike laughs out.

However, Yuji is still sulking as he puts the bento Yoshida made for him into his mouth.

"...It's still as good as ever."

"Is, is that so? Thank you."

And this seems to be a daily routine (though a minority of 1 person is extremely unhappy about this). This seems to be something both of them will say everyday.

"What...is this sliced up pizza thing?"

"It's called Quiche and it's a common dish in France."

Being asked, Yoshida happily answered. This is another typical scene.

Mix some vegetables and butter into the batter, add some

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cheese on top, and then fry it together. The vegetables will be delicious like this, so I often make this...does it fit your tastes?"

"Oh, this is the first time I knew that vegetables and cheese can be so delicious when mixed together!"

"Yes, but you'll get fat if you eat too much of this."

"Haha, it's alright for Yoshida-san--"

"Yuji?"

At this moment, Shana just interrupted them without restrain.

"Eh?"

"The chocolate I gave you today is bought from a famous old Western shop 'Adoll'. That shop was started in the 35th year of the Meiji era, and got a lot of awards in the Cafe Bakery Show. It's the most prestigious of the prestigious!"

"Ah..."

Shana seems to be matching Yoshida word for word as she states these facts that has nothing to do with chocolate itself. For some reason, she gives a prideful look of victory as she continues to stuff the melon bread into her mouth.



Seeing her like this, Yuji just exchanged look with Yoshida, and Satou and Tanaka just cracked up.

(...?)

Ike feels that this daily scene is a bit too natural. Feeling surprised, he continues off with the interrupted conversation,

"...Well, it's the exams tomorrow. Is everyone ready yet?"

As for the answer to this question, it's a no-brainer.

Any boy or girl in Misaki City will definitely reply 'of course not'. This isn't just a 'social rule' as a student, because anyone would have focused on preparing for the Misago Festival!

To the teachers who have to set this annual tradition of setting this exam while the students' minds are blank, it's a troublesome thing to them (but because of what happened during the Misago Festival this year, everyone ended up even more excited.)

---

Hearing Ike's question, Satou and Tanaka give a to-be-expected bitter look.

"Well, how could we possibly have time..."

"And we were busy during the past few days. Haha."

While the two people who wanted Margery's approval in something other than studies got their results, they got punishment waiting for them as well. For the two of them, who don't really have good grades, this exam is a crisis."

And though Yuji's grades are borderline, after so much has happened recently, his grades have started to slip. Thus, he sweat out as he says,

"Mm, really busy."

"Ya...eah..."

Yoshida is basically of the outstanding group, so she just randomly added that.

"Ah, uhm."

Completely ignoring their conversation, Shana is happily stuffing the last of the melon melon into her mouth.

"...?"

Being extremely alert to other people's feelings, Ike senses something's wrong with their tone and attitude. And on a closer look, he realises that they have a common relationship.

Then, he even recalls what happened this morning, and also the changes that they themselves don't even know of.

(Did they end up being involved in something...?)

In truth, he had a terrifying premonition when he came to school.

When he was at the Misago Festival, he met a pale and panting Yoshida.

No matter what, that expression of hers clearly indicate that it's no small matter. Something must have happened that clearly has huge consequences. Having saw this, he feels utterly unhappy that she didn't ask him

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for help, so he decided that he has to help her out no matter what.

However for some reason, he ended up separately from her after that.

He just abandoned her even after seeing her like this.

This is a mistake that he couldn't possibly have made, but the truth is that he really lost her. It's unknown when he started to be alone when he walked around the temple . After that he did try to look for her, but there's tens of thousands of people in the crowd. While looking around, the temple event ended. To him, there's nothing more depressing to him than this.

However, the really unbelievable thing happened this morning.

The one who appeared in front of him because of what happened at the temple was Yoshida herself. But that her seem to have lost all the frailty that was in her, giving her a sense of liveliness.

(--'Something bad happened that time, so I was all frantic, but I'm alright now'--)

---

The her what said this shyly, and the one before they got separated...even the one before, there's a huge difference between them all. That feeling of frailty disappeared through the night, He felt strength in her gentle smile.

(What, happened?)

Ever since then, Ike's been thinking about this.

She developed in ways he didn't even know of, went through something he didn't know of, handled matter in a way he didn't know of, got a result he didn't know of, and managed to solve everything.

He's no longer a kid, even if he continues to perhaps, maybe, possibly, should be--there shouldn't be anything he should be unhappy about. Even if he actively tried to help her, even when he's acting too much of a busybody, he hoped that she can get stronger.

But having seen her change without him helping out, once he understood that she doesn't need his help, he developed an icy sense of loss.

There can only be reason reason for this drastic change

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(Most likely--it's Sakai)

Yuji must have done something to her.

Or she did something to Yuji.

(She became firmer. Don't tell me she went to 'say' it?)

If he's to look at things like that, Yuji does look somewhat weird, or rather, extremely energetic.

(Sakai and Yoshida-san changed together, did they?)

After deducing what happened between them, he suddenly feels shocked by the aching pain that suddenly occurred within him.

At first, his aim at helping her is to bring her and Sakai Yuji together, so this pain should be completely illogical. With this fluctuating of feelings that can yet calmly analyse his own personality, he starts to feel irritated with himself.

(Never mind.)

The bespectacled weirdo can only sigh deeply within him.

---

Though others always praise him for being smart, skillful and the like, in fact, what he feels about himself is that he's so lousy. And right now, it seems like he became an outsider, thus he really feels unhappy about this. Of course, this is just baseless assumption, and he can't do anything to but.

But he still feels very unhappy with it.

(This is embarrassing.)

At this moment--

"Hm?"

He seem to notice someone behind him, so he turns around to look. Tanigawa and Kobayashi are chatting about nonsensical stuff, Nakamura is doing make-up again, and Yomoto is ravaging the lunch box...looking around the noisy classroom, he realises that someone's hiding under his chair.

"Hehe--"

The person giggled like someone who got caught in a game of hide-and-seek. It's Ogata matake.

"What's up, Ogata-san?"

Hearing Ike's words, Tanaka's face looks nervous.

And Satou is giving an evil grin.

"Well..."

Standing up, Ogata looks rather tall. She's a member of a volleyball team, so she's basically one of the skinny ones. As for her looks and personality, it's more accurate to call her cool than cute. However, for some reason, her attitude and expression is rather gentle.

"Ike-kun, you were talking about the exams, right?"

"...That's right, but..."

After Ike honestly answered her, Ogata turns her head aside, coughs and says,

"Then how about we start a study group?"

"A study group?"

Recently, it seems like most of the students haven't heard of such an activity.

Ogata takes a deep breath, and continues,

"From today onwards, we'll be gathering to study for 3 days. My condition is also rather bad, so if Ike-kun and Kasumi teach me, maybe I can pull a few all-nighters and barely make it through. So if possible, how does everyone here feel about this?"

She quickly said these words as if she's reciting some recipe, and even emphasized on the 'everyone here'. While saying that, her eyes roll at Tanaka. Based on this...

(Hehe...)

The smart Ike immediately saw through what she's thinking and slaps himself on the forehead.

(Ya...)

As another person like her who's in love, Yoshida covers her mouth, clearly understanding the real motive behind this.

---

And as for the rest--

"Hehehe..."

"OI, WHAT ARE YOU SNICKERING FOR?"

Tanaka roars at Tanaka, who's laughing weirdly beside him, and his face is blushing.

Ogata had already confessed to Tanaka, and only Satou knows about this. When they came back from the Misago Festival, it seemed sort of romantic. But in fact, it was when a Crimson Lord that ordinary humans didn't know of arrived, and at that point, Tanaka felt like it wasn't time to say that.

And the memory he had of her confession was still in limbo, so it's to be expected that there's a sense of nervousness and awkwardness between them.

"So, so how is it?"

Her tone almost change, Ogata asked Yuji for some reason. Maybe she felt that among the 6 of them, except for the girl who's not interested in this, they seem to revolve around Yuji.

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"A study group, huh..."

Not understanding why he's being stared at like this, Yuji naturally considered it. It's true that if Ike, Yoshida and Shana are teaching him, his sinking grades should be able to improve (though based on his standard, he spent quite some time studying already.)

At this moment, Ike suddenly agrees,

"That's cool. I'm fine with this."

Having sensed the situation between Ogata and Tanaka, he wants to create an opportunity for them and be a busybody...at least that's an excuse he gave for himself.

Right now, he really wishes to get some contact with Yuji, and is jealous that Yuji managed to change her. These motivations make his heart seem complicated, but it's just simple. Though it's slightly evil, it's not for any heinous purpose.

As a boy, Ike Hayato saw that Sakai Yuji overcame a huge obstacle and feels unhappy about this.

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And after Yuji ponders for a few seconds, he says,

"...Mn..."

Being caught up in his friends' replies, he gulped as he reluctantly agreed.

"I agree! That should be great--right?"

Satou says as he nudges the shoulder of his good friend who twisted his body around.

Tanaka, who was nudged by Satou, turns around to look with those narrow eyes of his. He can't face her eyes straight on, and can only blush as he looks away.

"Sigh, really. Okay okay, there's no problems. You fine with that?"

He finally succumbed.

Seeing Ogata revealing an excited look, Yoshida says to the person opposite her,

"Shana-chan?"

"Ngh--"

Shana, who was 'acting like it doesn't concern her' as she bit the croissant, finally puts down the thing she was biting on, stuffs the paper bag in her hand into the already jammed full plastic bag, and then ponders.

A study group. It's the first time she heard of it. Based on the term used and the contents of their conversation, she can probably tell what they meant, and can understand what Yoshida meant by 'let's go together'. She has a bit of interest, but at the same time--

(How is it that she can say such thing?)

The girl who was always stuttering can now such that so naturally to her 'enemy'. She feels somewhat fearful, as the 'enemy's concern makes her uncomfortable.

(It's alright if she's someone irritating...)

On that night when the incident happened, Yoshida Kazumi told Sakai Yuji 'I love you'.

She already made that declaration to herself since a long time ago, and finally says it now.

(I...like Yuji too.)

Before that incident happened, only she, as a Flame Haze, knew of what happened to Sakai Yuji.

The remains of Sakai Yuji, the human who was devoured and killed by the 'Crimson Denizens' who attacked this city.

The mystes who has the treasure tool 'Reiji Maigo' that can interfere with timely phenomenon inside him.

The one who's able to sense the slight changes in existence other than Flame Hazes and has terrific senses.

The one whose mind becomes abnormally calm and versatile in times of crisis.

She knew all these facts about Sakai Yuji.

(And there's a lot more to him.)

The way he holds hands, the things he likes and hates, the strengths and weaknesses when he trains, the casual attitude he has towards life, the etiquette and so on. Having followed him for so long, she knew a lot of things about him.

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(However.)

Ever since then, Yoshida Kazumi knew the true identity of Sakai Yuji.

She knew of this existence of his is just a remnant of the 'real Sakai Yuji'.

Having known that, she still told Sakai Yuji that 'I love you'.

It's really unbelievable.

She definitely knows the true.

Yoshida's standing in a place she and Yuji is...she barged into the place.

The fact that she's a Flame Haze isn't an advantage now.

She never expected such a situation.

She became an equal opponent to him.

(I like Yuji.)

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Even if she has to throw a kid's tantrum, she won't back away again. And even now, her time 'together with Sakai Yuji' will continue to increase. Only she knows all sorts of things about Sakai Yuji, and she wants to take him.

However, that's not all.

(I'm scared.)

The power of thinking about Yuji's way too powerful.

It's hard to control it with her will.

No matter whether it's in a battlefield or in other situations.

This power will randomly lose control and explode.

That's the power of something dangerous yet terrifying, a bitter feeling, and she had her fill with it 3 days ago. In a time when she had to focus, she still thought of Yuji,

Harbouring anxiety in her battle just because he isn't around.

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Every time she thinks of it, there will be a strong sense of loneliness in her.

That's a certain level of mental imbalance in that first battle.

The strangest thing is, in that battle--the battle against the Crimson Denizens who fought because of love and died because of it--she had the same feelings. But at that time, she had an unbelievable amount of happiness and power radiating from her.

She doesn't know what's going on.

(I'm scared, of loving.)

It's because she can't 'control her own emotions', the Flame Haze 'Flame-haired Burning eyes Hunter's only belief, her mission, her upbringing and all are rattled, shaken, and even changed.

(Even so...)

But her heart's thinking 'I don't want to lose to her'.

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As for the emotions that caused her to be rattled, shaken, and so on, she's unable to suppress this self-confidence.

That's the scariest thing.

(Or.)

Or is it before this feeling has changed somewhat.

She doesn't really remember what kind of existence she was before she came here.

But if it was like what happened today.

(Most likely, I will choose to do something different.)

It seems like the change in her is large enough for her to realise her doubts.

It happened this morning, before the lessons begin.

Satou and Tanaka rushed into the classroom at the last minute, and at that moment, Tanaka--

“Oh, morning Shana.”

“What's that?”

“Shana?”

The other classmates who greeted her didn't understand what's going on, and at this moment, Satou explained,

“Oh, that's her new nickname. From today onwards, this girl isn't called Hirai Yukari, but Shana. Please take care of her!”

“...”

He then patted her on the shoulder as if they're rather familiar with each other.

“That's weird.”

“Why are we calling her this out of a sudden?”

“It's really weird to call her this so suddenly...”

Just as the few classmates were whispering away and looking puzzled, Satou shot a glance at Yoshida, who's near the teacher's table. Yoshida immediately blushed red and thanked them before sitting down.

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In this city, Shana's living as a girl called 'Hirai Yukari'.

As for the 'real Hirai Yukari', she was devoured in the Jizaiho attack that targeted the entire city, and even her entire family was killed. Shana placed her existence into the torch left behind by Hirai Yukari, and thus obtained the means to live and is therefore able to protect Yuji's identity and the treasure tool inside him.

Having stayed here for several months, as her family of torches have already vanished, it seemed like she was living alone. But in fact, she's mostly staying at the Sakai's residence, and the Hirai's residence is just where she goes to sleep. The name 'Hirai Yukari' can only be called an alias at school, as Yuji and Chigusa always call her 'Shana'.

But to Yoshida Kazumi, the real 'Hirai Yukari's her friend.

That friend got devoured with her entire family, and a Flame Haze even took her identity. She knew about all these 3 days ago.

Though she was severely affected by it, in fact, because of Shana taking the role of a substitute, Yoshida can't

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even remember anything involving the 'real Hirai Yukari', and never felt any loss. She's just puzzled by the fact that she lost a friend, and her friend gradually sank as a result.

Even so, since Hirai Yukari still exists to the world, Shana would still be called 'Hirai Yukari' by everyone. The reason why Satou and Tanaka did so was actually to reduce the burden in Yoshida's heart. At least when there's a few more people in their group, they would try not to use the name 'Hirai Yukari'.

"Oi, Satou, what are you doing, making such a ruckus in the morning!?"

"Oh, sorry."

Having been caught by the homeroom teacher who came here early for homeroom lesson, Satou frantically got back into his seat.

Around him, several people were muttering,

"Why call her Shana?"

"I don't know, but the name's pretty cool."

Anyway, it's best to just announce the name. Even though it may just be etched in a few people's memories, once they actually interact with her, Yuji, Satou and company, the other classmates will start to get used to it. That's how a nickname comes about anyway.

In that short commotion, Shana doesn't respond even after being patted on the back by Satou. Though it wasn't with killing intent, someone did touch her without warning.

However, she didn't react at all.

Deep inside, she felt that it's nothing.

As the Flame Haze 'Flame-haired Burning-eyed Hunter', she actually felt this way.

(If it were the past, I would have thrown Satou Keisaku out and make them shut up like that.)

Realising this difference, she frowned.

“Shana?”

(Hm...?)

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The moment she got called back, she recovers and finds that everything is staring at her intently. She can feel that 'we hope that you can come along' atmosphere everyone's giving her.

*The final decision isn't going to be made by me, and it's not like you can't go without me. Can you people decide yourself...* while thinking about this, she remembers that this group of boys and girls are creatures who feel happy when 'everyone's together'.

(It's true that I don't have any reason to refuse them.)

Ogata's making a pose with both hands palmed together, and Shana remembers that this is a 'please' action.

Ike's not showing any expressions, Satou's giving an expectant look, and Tanaka's giving a look of reluctance.

Yoshida's just staring into her, not showing that will and resistance, and just treating her as a friend.

They're supposed to be 'enemies' who aren't supposed to exist with each other.

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(But if she's just an irritating person...I can just take Yuji away and get away from here.)

In order to escape from this pain, she turns to the person beside her. However, on doing this, she starts to feel irritated by this action. It's like she's returning a look to others, and it doesn't feel good at all.

And sensing this, Yuji immediately asks,

“What is it?” Recently, Yuji's becoming a lot more aware in excessive areas, and is getting even more irritating nowadays.

“...”

But of course, she doesn't really hate him.

“...I...just don't know how to go about doing it.”

“You just need to teach others.” Yuji's really grateful for the morning and night power of existence training she gave him and responded.

Seemingly anxious for everyone to gather, Ogata loudly declares as if it was decided.

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“So that's settled, right?”

“It's settled! We have 'the megane-monster' helping us out this time.”

“Ah...”

Satou clamps onto Tanaka's shoulder and sways him about like a comrade on the same boat.

Ike just grimaces as faces the girl opposite, hiding his complicated feelings and says,

“You people say it as if it's really easy, but with Yoshida-san around, there shouldn't be a problem.”

“Hn...as long as it's within my ability...”

Seeing her humble response, Yuji thinks,

(If that's the case, we're all set.)

He thought as he asks,

“It's good that we're having a study group, but where will we be meeting at?”

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“Of course at Satou's house. It's big, no one else's staying there, and we can even cook!” Having known Satou and Tanaka since Middle School, Ogata replied as a matter of fact.

The large Mana river that divides Misaki city in half is separated into East and West, and these two areas are developed differently.

“We just need a little space in my house, please, Margery nee-san.” “I'm not going! Didn't you say that 'you can stay wherever you like'?”

Located in the mountainous area on the West side of Misaki City, there's a shrine that acts as a nucleus. It's said that this was a guardian shrine in the extremely ancient ages to control the Mana River that often flooded, and there were many bird nests on the flat hilly region ( that act as the entrance wall of the shrine). It was said to be the start of the development of Misaki City.

“Pl, please don't say such heartless things, nee-san...”

“What heartless? And I normally won't go about randomly. I just need to drink some booze around here, and that what revision of yours will be over, right?”

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After that, when the flood control of the Mana River was okay, a large piece of farmland appeared on the east. As it was near to the main streets, the residents lives start to move east and start to move east.. On the West, where the Misaki Shrine is, some group took the land and formed their luxurious residence, forming the residence of the rulers.

“But the bar's too close to the washroom...Marchosias, help!”

“Hehehe, Keisaku, how can my lazy sandbag Margery Daw possibly move her large and heavy bottom OW!”

By the time the Edo period came, the management for the Misaki Shrine became a lot more chaotic, and many pieces of land were sold out at low prices. Thus, the population start to move en masse to the west, which is now called the residence area. It was then where it all began. On a side note, Misaki High was set up at about the same time (though it was called 'Misaki Standard Middle School' under the old standard.)

“And besides, weren't you crying and begging me 'please don't leave'? You changed your minds already?”

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“That's not it. It's just that...there's a girl who will misunderstand on seeing nee-san.”

Then, after the war, the entire Eastern area that should belong to the landowner were arranged into farmlands. At the same time, the development of Misaki Train Station began, and the Eastern area start to become a modern town (and now, it's called a 'city state') as it starts to develop. Also, under the law, both East and West combined to form 'Misaki City' which was how Misaki City was born.

“No, that...is...”

Satou's house is considered one of the premier houses in the East. After the city alignment was done, the people of the old settlement are staying in the Eastern side, and that's collectively known as the 'Old District'. And this entire land of the old district used to be the Satou's territory. One can easily see how powerful Satou's family was at that time, and until now, the influence doesn't seem to have been reduced.

“No matter what, I won't leave this place. The most I'll do is to sleep here.”

---

“Hehe, you people better pray that nothing bad happens.”

Walking in from the road, one can see a wall surrounding an area and a gate that's located in the middle. This is the overall impression that old settlement gives. And perhaps it's obvious, but Satou's house is the rather large type even in this old settlement. On the other side, though it's not considered nearby, Tanaka's house is located nearby.

“...Satou...”

“If there's no other way, we can only pray.”

As tomorrow's the exam, the 'revision meeting' gathering that Ogata proposed must be held at night—and not too late so that they can be dismissed.

And for today, which is the first day, it's different from the exam days that end in the morning, they have to take lessons in the afternoon. Even if they immediately gather at Satou's house after school, they won't be able to get too much them. Also, the girls will have to go home and dress themselves up before coming back.

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Including the fact that they want to meet at Satou's house to cook dinner, this event just got a lot more interesting.

As there's nobody else living in Satou's house, Satou's been living a lonely life (as there's a lot of unhappy things going on now, he really doesn't want to say it), so once the cleaner on day duty heads home, he would be the only one left in the house. Even though they're gathering for such an uninteresting thing like a revision, it isn't really any different from camping.

Amongst them, Tanaka's the most hardworking one out of them all.

"My house's cookhouse is rather big. As for the ingredients needed, just put it over there."

And it's all because of Satou's words.

Though Yoshida has never been to Satou's house, she heard him and some friends joking about it, so she knows that it's a pretty big house.

"I often cooked a bit, so if it's not too complicated, I can help—"

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"Th, then, how big is it?"

--Hearing him call it a 'cookhouse' and not a 'kitchen', this girl who loves to cook immediately asked.

"eh? Well...this..."

"How's the oven and the deep-fryer? Is there a grill or a stove? Does it have a microwave?" Hearing her spout out a list of terms that he doesn't even understand, Satou looks rather confused, making one question whether she's there to study or to cook. In the end, she even insisted on being the cook of this study group.

And beside her, Ogata--

"What's with that expression of yours? Do I have to cook just because I'm a girl? That's gender discrimination ."

"I didn't even say anything!"

Feeling inferior, she starts to throw her tantrum at Tanaka who wasn't involved in this.

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Right now, Yuji and Shana are heading towards Satou's house as they proceed down the road.

Of course, as they're having a study meeting later, they changed into plainclothes.

As usual, Yuji's wearing a printed T-shirt with a matching blue jeans; it's a pretty uninteresting get-up. He's holding onto a bag that has his and Shana's textbooks and notes in them.

As for Shana, she's wearing a loose T-shirt that's narrowed at the waist. Naturally, this was deliberately chosen by Chigusa. She's also holding onto a cake box that Chigusa gave to her, telling her 'these are snacks to be shared amongst everyone'.

Both of them aren't walking on the pedestrian pathways on the side, but right down the middle of the road.

The entire road linking both sides of the city has basically become a pedestrian pathway.

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Both of them aren't walking on the pedestrian pathways on the side, but right down the middle of the road.

The entire road linking both sides of the city has basically become a pedestrian pathway.

The transport in the area from the front of the Misaki Bridge to the damaged Misaki City Train station is restricted, and no cars are allowed to enter or exit.

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The entire road is covered by crowds on both sides, and this scene that shouldn't be able to occur now occupies the entire place.

And one can see vehicles covered in nylon sheets all over the place. Those are vehicles that were caught in accidents due to what happened the last time. As the people wait for the vehicles to be towed away, the road became a pedestrian pathway, and thus, the vehicles are just left them.

The fragments of the crashed cars' indicator lights look extremely lonely, and the restoration work in front of the train station gives an ominous feeling. However, forming a stark contrast to this is a loud and buzzing sound.

Going down the streets, the shops, including some that aren't supposed to be here, are packed with commotion. The open-air snack restaurants and have tables and chairs arranged outside, and the shop attendants are touting the pedestrians. And in the midst of all these, for some reason, there are two youths eating bentos, a group of girls eating parfaits and feeling really refreshed, a few

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old mean sitting underneath an umbrella attached to a table as they continue to drink coffee casually and a few other kinds of people.

In the space between the shops, there are all sorts of mini-stalls with waterproof nylon sheets laid on the floor selling all sorts of things as if it's normal. Also, there are still new reporters and cameramen who're heading towards the city to make reports, and there are lots and lots of noises in the air, forming a bustling crowd.

(They're still able to do that after such a destruction even though they don't remember anything.)

It's true that a lot of misfortune was caused when the event happened, and inconvenience was caused now. Even so, as long as humans live on, they have to face these realities to the fullest extent.

(Humans are really amazing.)

Yuji feels rather relieved on seeing them still continuing on with their everyday life even after such a paranormal disaster.

And the torches who were mixed among them (Yuji has always been seeing torches as humans)--and the

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phenomenon of human remains that he was fearful of has drastically reduced thanks to the the 'tuning' of the world's distortion.

Though he doesn't understand the principals behind tuning and the workings behind it, he can't somewhat understand what's going on. The tuner Khamsin said 'that the distortion that's present on the balance will adjusts the deficiencies in the future', and he could roughly understand it.

In contrast to the day when he met Shana, when he felt despair and lost all hope on seeing such devastation, the world in front of him right now is gradually recovering and showing life. That's what he feels.

But on the other hand, such devastation caused quite the abnormal change and such heavy destruction. The power that the Flame Hazes faced when they fought against the Crimson Load can't be ignored.

(We weren't lucky that no one died in such a large-scale battle. It was a miracle.)

Like what Khamsin said before he left, such a miracle was just a coincidence.

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That's because the mastermind behind the attack, the Crimson Lord was only focused on creating the jizaiho, and the Crimson Denizens were placed in a secondary position. It was just because of that reason.

In fact, if their intention was like the Crimson Lord who launched the initial attack to devour all humans, there would be hundreds, thousands, even more casualties, and Yuji and the Hirai Yukari-disguised Shana walking beside her would become victims of the fight.

(Could we have handled it better?)

Right now, opposite the road—at Misaki City Station, he can see many bulldozers and cranes doing all sort of cleaning up on rubble. It's said by his classmates that they were working non-stop ever since rain stopped. Even a human can tell that it will take some time to repair it.

Also, Misaki City Station is an interchange that's linked to many lines, and it's hard to estimate the impact to the civilians caused by the downtime of the station. Even though they heard of emergency procedures to send buses to link the stops before and after the station,

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this isn't going to be enough to deal with the large number of passengers. There are many students who take the train to Misaki City school, and the school was forced to silently allow them to ride bicycles to school.

All these happened just because a gear was in the wrong place.

“...They were just unable to set up a fuzetsu, that's all.”

“?”

Shana tilts her neck. From just this little action, Yuji can already tell what she meant.

Not sensing that her body is closing in on him, Yuji replies,

“Shana, I see that you and the rest use a lot of fuzetsus, but I never expected it to be so important. Just not using it once is enough to cause such destruction.”

Shana glances around to look at the consequences of the battle, and then raises an important topic with a casual tone.

“Do you want to try?”

---

“Eh?”

“Practise how to use the jizaiho 'fuzetsu' and restore the place.”

Yuji sounds shocked, expectant and hesitant as he asks

“Can I use a jizaiho? Can a mystes do such a thing...?”

“Of course you can. Mystes have special characteristics according to the type of treasure tool in their bodies, and some even have power that can allow them to defeat Crimson Lords.”

“Eh, you fought with them before?”

“Mn.”

Shana nods her head and recalls the mystes with the one-eyed mask and samurai armour who handed the nodachi 'Nietono no Shana' to her, and the close shave she had when she nearly died.

“I nearly died. If it's just on swordmanship alone, I never met anyone stronger than him.”

---

Hearing her say such direct thoughts, Yuji can only admire the infinite possibilities that's hidden in a mystes.

"That's powerful, but I don't know whether I have that suitability to use it."

"You did manage to control the power of existence within you, and even sent the uncomfortable feeling 'Sydonay' placed in you away, right? I believe such basics is more than adequate."

In a past battle, as a mystes, Yuji once faced a crisis of his existence being eroded, and the treasure tool within him, the 'Reiji Maigo' was nearly taken away by the powerful Crimson Lord Sydonay. Sydonay's arm stabbed through his body and nearly eroded it.

At that moment.

The jizaiho that's protecting the hidden treasure tool severed Sydonay's arm.

When, who, how, why, nobody knows the reason why it was casted. Even though it was a mysterious power, it's thanks to that that Yuji's able to survive.

---

But as a consequence, Sydonay's arm continues to reside in him. In order to suppress this chill of having an arm inside him, he had to go through tough training.

However, that feeling suddenly disappeared in the battle 3 days ago. Ever since he started to rage because of 'a certain event', he managed to grasp the concept behind it, and the arm fused into his body. Ever since then, he hasn't felt the existence of Sydonay's arm.

"Hm, I could really feel that I'm a lot more confident than before in sensing the flow of the power of existence, however,"

"You still feel uneasy about it?"

Shana slightly bends down to look at that boy's unreliable face. The soft and shiny black hair slides down her shoulders.

Amazed at her natural state, Yuji smiles and says,

"Of course. Though I can use the power of the Reiji Maigo to recover, that's just a person's worth of Power of Existence. It can't be compared to a Flame Haze or a Crimson Denizen, right?"

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“Eh? Haven't you realised it yet?”

“What?”

“...Alastor.”

Shana doesn't answer Yuji's question, instead asking the 'cocytus' in front of her chest.

“I suppose we should observe him some more before that. As for training, there's no problem. We just need to slowly train his familiarity in developing jizaiho, and that should be enough to help develop the situational analysis and control.”

The Crimson Lord who's contracted to the youth first raised a ludicrous proposal to Yuji as he accepted it.

Yuji asked,

“Tell me, what do you want to tell me?”

Facing a confused Yuji, Shana shakes her head and answers,

“I can't say it now, but right now, there's no signs at all , so you can relax.”

---

“...I don't think there's anyone who'll relax after hearing such an answer.”

“Urusai urusai urusai! There's nothing wrong! I'll find a solution when that happens, no matter what. Since Alastor agreed...”

Saying halfway through, Shana suddenly stares at Yuji and blinks

(What's wrong?)

Yuji wonder.

“What's wrogn?”

“Nothing. We'll start on fuzetsu training tonight.”

“Hm, since Shana said so, there shouldn't be any problems.”

Shana says to Yuji, who answered with faith.

“Yuji.”

“What's wrong?”

Shana looks up at Yuji from below, and says again,

“Yuji.”

“What's wrong?”

Having gotten her response, Shana still doesn't answer as she walks and watches him. She then says again,

“Yuji.”

“...What?”

Yuji's wondering if there's something stuck on his face and inadvertently touches it.

Seeing such an action, Shana chuckles,

“Idiot.”

“Oi, what are you saying now?”

Yuji looks incredulous.

After seeing Shana smile, he returned a smile back at her.

---

(Is that so?)

Shana thought.

(If it were these problems, I can talk with Yuji without hindrance.)

It's unknown whether she got a new direction or whether she found something she dropped.

(But as long as I can talk with Yuji like this, I'm happy.)

The girl starts to feel that the tense feeling in her heart had disappeared completely.

(If I'm with Yuji, there's nothing for me to be afraid of.)

At this moment,

Her nose starts to react to some aroma and senses the source of it.

“The melon bread is moving.”

“What?”

Still dazed, Yuji doesn't know what to do as Shana uses short steps to run through the crowd and stands in front of a bread shop.

It's actually a mobile melon bread shop that's modified from the back part of a car.

“Please give me one.”

Facing this girl who's fizzy red in excitement, the shop attendant loudly replies,

“OKAY! ONE MELON BREAD!”

Yuji says with reluctance.

“Mum already gave you cake to bring over. And we have to eat dinner.”

“I'll eat that later.”

“Ah, yes.”

After answering, Yuji suddenly realises something. During the past few days, there was some mysterious anger vented up within him, and it's disappeared out of a sudden even though he didn't do anything.

Shana holds back her happiness within and receives the melon bread from the shop attendant, before saying,

"Anyway, we'll start learning the basics of a fuzetsu today and start training how to manipulate the power of existence."

"Okay okay. Let's study till night and then train at the roof. The time during these three days is really packed, haha."

Yuji grimaced as he laughed.

Shana herself takes out the melon bread that was just baked and starts to eat it happily, smiling radiantly as she continues to walk forward.

"Hm, what is it?"

"No, I just feel that it's weird."

Yuji finally catches up to her. Seeing her reveal that 'melon bread effect' smile, he can only smile awkwardly.

"I feel that I'm controlling some Power of Existence and Fuzetsu or something like that, that kind of terrifying thing that overwhelms all human knows of--"

His eyes suddenly turn to stare at the cross junction.

Over there, behind the sign that's indicates 'no access' and opposite the safety cones with danger lines on the ground, the narrow road that acts as a replacement for the big road is jammed tight, and there's police sirens and car hinks all over the place.

That is how people will accept things when they don't know what's going on in the world they're in.

--I do feel somewhat weird that I have to associate that with this ordinary life, like revising for exams or something."

Yuji, who was once a human, remarked. Having been born with the charge to be a Flame Haze, Shana really found it hard to understand.

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But she just continues to eat her melon bread as she answers Yuji with her own views.

"Well--hm, since we have to live in this city, we should try to act as what we're acting as well--well--hm, it's easier to collect information by mixing through the crowds than to hide in places or move around. And well--"

(As expected, Shana's looking at this problem from a work's perspective.)

Yuji feels that her cautious and upright attitude is rather interesting, and then, he suddenly remembers.

The second time he met Shana, even though he didn't really want to interact with her, he found her sitting beside him.

"I see...before coming here, you were doing things that are similar to the current substitute 'Hirai-san', is it?"

It seemed like he just realised it, that he imagined how she lived through a wanderer's life. That's because she

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didn't know how human emotions work and always remained a 'blank state' even though she had an adventurous past."

Shana nods her head slightly,

"If we find some Denizens who harbor ill intents, we have to do this."

After saying that, she takes another bite of the melon bread, and then continues to say to Yuji,

"Uhm...but it seems like I've been talking to people a lot more than usual nowadays, and the time I stayed here has always been around 3 days, since I had to find the Denizens and destroy them. I guess I can only use that time to 'live'."

"..."

Eh?

Shana seems to hear Yuji ask something, and then looks up at him.

"Noth—ah, we're here."

Yuji tries to hide what he was asking as he points to the path that can cut through the old district.

Shana didn't pursue any further as she follows him in.

The commotion and chaos that were present a while back seem to disappear out of a sudden. After walking about on the silent road for a while, Yuji finally says the question he wanted to ask, but didn't, in order to break this silence.

“Are you happy now?”

Shana answers Yuji with a question on her own,

“...Is that so...?”

“You seem to be looking happy now anyway.”

Yuji sensed that the girl's voice and expression is wavering slightly, which was why he said that.

“...Maybe.”

She finished the melon bread.

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Under the summer sun that hasn't set, the group of 7 gathered at Satou's house.

All the girls, including Shana, are dressed rather well, shocking the guys who haven't done any touch-ups ( Tanaka went to Satou's house in uniform).

Yoshida's wearing a plained-colored tank top and pleated skirt, and Ogata's wearing a widened sailor outfit with shorts. Both of them just had a little makeup on them, but one can tell that they put in a lot of effort.

"...I suppose we should understand what we're here for."

The reason why Ike said this to Yoshida, who he thought was the one person he didn't have to lecture, is not because she put makeup on, but because she's holding a lot of bags.

"So, sorry, but there's a large discount out there at the convenience store, so I spent quite some time there..."

However, the bags she's carrying aren't those hand-carried types, but the summer backpack kinds. One can tell from this that Yoshida really can't lie. Realizing

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that her lie was seen through Yoshida frantically lets Tanaka guide her to the cookhouse.

When he came back, Tanaka's noted that Yoshida's response on seeing the Satou's residence's cookhouse was

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"Amazing, that's an amazing gas stove, the oven's big too, that's an electric deep fryer, that's a grill, many water troughs--"

Hearing her say so many things out of a sudden, Tanaka could only understand half of it.

"I'll prepare dinner today. Everyone, please focus on studying!"

That's what she said.

Everyone feel that they shouldn't dampen her enthusiasm and thus agree to let her do as she wishes. Also, another reason is that everyone believes that she won't have any problems even if she doesn't cram hard.

The venue Satou prepared for everyone to study at is the 5th hall.

This bright and wide room has a wooden-carved floor and a thin carpet on it. The decorative tree that's placed at the last corner of the room is extremely big, and one may easily mistake it for a pillar that's supporting the ceiling. At the middle of the room, there's a large table that's made from tree branches with a board of glass over it, and there are cushions to be used for sitting down.

Anyway, this is a living room that doesn't seem to have excessive furniture, yet anyone can tell that they are rather expensive.

"As expected, rich people are so different."

Having came here a few times, Yuji sighed, and as for the only resident of this house, Satou says,

"Ahh, you can drink as much as you like."

He made such an incoherent reply.

He's referring to the water dispenser that's placed at the table. Of course, the dispenser gives iced water, and there's even a freezer nearby. That's really good service.

"I told them that we'll be making dinner on our own, and so they prepared all these for us. They even brewed

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some Buddha-sama or something like that. Anyway, it's something similar to malt tea."

On a side note, that's not some malt tea or Buddha, but Tieguanyin.

"Then, let's start. With such a good environment, I'm sure things can go through smoothly."

With the lead of megane man Ike, the revision started.

The large table is oval in shape, and since there's no restrictions, everyone just took a cushion and sat down.

Shana's sitting beside Yuji, Ogata's sitting beside Tanaka, and everyone just seem to sit down as how they like. OGata has already achieved half her objective, and now, she has to study. If she can improve grades, it's all the more better.

"Then, let's start working hard now--hehe."

She smiles at the person beside her.

"Then, let's start."

At this moment, Tanaka finally realizes it and freezes.

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Though he and Satou were planning (though it's a severe overestimation on their part) on how to fight without the strong female Margery Daw, who they so admired, the fact that Satou experienced first hand 3 days ago showed that he couldn't even help her in strength, and he may end up in danger too. Though this was something he knew right from the beginning, at least he finally experienced it and understood.

Right now, both of them are bothered about how they should develop their abilities.

Before that incident happened, they went about doing that in a roundabout manner, and what they got was a 'just use your brain' answer. However, they have no clue on what they should do.

The ideal state is to be like Sakai Yuji, whose superhuman knowledge can give hints to the Flame Hazes by giving them strategies. However, this isn't something that can be done through special training. They feel that if the only way they can get to that level is to study, take part in little things like riddles and puzzles.

If there's a need to point it out, it's that they can only study.

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In that sense, Tanaka feels that this study session is a good change, and to a certain extent, he wants to thank Ogata, and he feels that it's nothing much to let her sit beside him. Though this action may seem somewhat stiff.

Besides, it can't be helped since he's a boy who's still not used to having someone liking him.

(But even though I got confessed to, I can't say that there's some obvious development.)

After making such a heartless assumption, he frowns and asks Megane-man-sensei.

"Well, please teach me the answers to those questions that will appear in the exams."

The first question has been raised.

The study group proceeded much better than expected.

That's because of Ike Hayato being such a great teacher

Basically, he's someone who will accomodate others. Thus, he's extremely good at negotiate disputes and

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quarrels and even raise the atmosphere. In other words, he's someone who's able to detect what others are thinking and think for others.

Like for example, when Satou asked him,

"Where can this 'learning' be used?"

Then, Ike will listen to Satou a little more to deduce what he's talking about, and once he realizes it, he will think of how to explain it correctly.

"This can be linked to 'a little learning' in front to form a noun."

And he can accurately present what he thinks to others

"Well, if you remove the 'is' in the middle, wouldn't that be a lot easier?"

"Ahh! I see!"

On the other hand.

"Well, why is 'child' the main subject, and the noun behind it is 'father'?"

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Unable to understand Tanaka's intent behind the question,

"The text itself is like this. You just need to follow the normal sentence structure to understand."

Declaring the correct answer she just realized--she's basically declaring 'the logical step that should happen'.

"...Then, what's with the 'man' at the end?"

"It's used as a noun to the 'of the' in front."

"I, AM, ASKING, WHY THAT IS THE CASE!?"

"It's nothing much, that's just how it is."

Having said something correct that the other person still doesn't understand, Shana's showing a 'I don't understand why he doesn't understand' look, and has a 'completely opposite' talent from Ike.

"Haha, it's not enough to have a flexible mind."

Yuji said half jokingly.

"URUSAI URUSAI URUSAI! I SAID THAT I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO!!"

Shana argued back with her ears flushed.

"Well, it's rather good for the teacher to explain the answer clearly."

Ike immediately comforted.

"Don't say all these, Ike~! Tell me what to do~"

Tanaka cuddles his own head as he complained.

"I already understood after hearing the explanation. You just didn't listen carefully, did you?"

Ogata's enjoying the time she's together with him.

"Ahh, seems like you got the initiative."

Satou dampened the enthusiasm in her when he said that.

"Dinner's ready."

Yoshida placed all the dishes on the cart and pushed it over.

Hearing that there's food to eat, everyone immediately stood up at the same time.

There's all sorts of dishes of different sizes that's spread all over the dining table.

"This is great, Yoshida-san! That's sakai's been eating such good stuff everyday? Damn it, I'm so envious!"

Tanaka chews on a piece of fried meat as he continues to talk crudely.

Showing an embarrassed smile, Yoshida pours sauce into the last bowl, her own.

"I couldn't make some more dishes like meat stew since there wasn't much time..."

"Well, anyone who's still unsatisfied after eating such luxurious food should be struck down with diving punishment."

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Ike's eating the same food as Tanaka, and can somewhat feel a numbing spiciness.

"THere's a lot of ingredients in this omelette. Did you add something special to it?"

Ogata's somewhat mindful about Tanaka complaining with regards to cooking as she humbly inquired.

"Well, there wasn't any rice, so I just added the ingredients used to make katsu don."

Seeing Yoshida smile awkwardly, Satou gives an 'ah shucks' look and says.

"Ah, maybe that's because I told them we don't need dinner. Didn't take not of that. Sorry."

"No, it's alright. It's great to cook with what I have."

After saying that, she turns to look at Yuji.

She really wants to show her feelings to the boy who's eating the omelette happily.

Just this action alone is enough to fill Yoshida's heart with warmth and comfort. All the worries, anxiety and even despair are swept away because he's in front of her. She says to him,

"Is there anything you don't like?"

"None at all, they're great. Yoshida-san can really cook. The omelette already tastes like a different dish altogether just by changing its flavor."

"Is it different from how Sakai-kun's house does it?"

"Yeah, though I really don't know what to say."

Stunned, Yuji just gives a 'haha' laugh.

Not using a proud tone, Yoshida says to Shana, who's beside Yuji and drinking the soup.

"How is it, Shana?"

"Mn, tastes good."

Shana briefly replied and put her mouth back at the bowl. Though she's saying it plainly, there's no stiffness or ill-intent on her face.

"That's great."

Yoshida answers her with a smile and finally picks up her chopsticks.

She's not giving off that weak and delicate feeling, and though this doesn't mean that she became all stiff and so on, all the changes can be seen through her actions. She just faced Yuji and Shana with confidence, not feeling worried that they're together, and the feelings within her wouldn't change.

Right now, she's showing her feelings through a normal way.

Right now, Shana's feeling envious of Yoshida with regards to 'another matter' as she can't help but mutter,

"That's amazing. If only I could do that..."

"Eh?"

Just as Yoshida's about to ask her what she's saying, Ike says,

"Yoshida-san, how do you intend to go about with your revision?"

"Ah, I already noted down what I wanted Ike-kun to teach me. Can I let you help me after I finish clearing up?"

"No problems, leave it to me."

Ike casually said (though his heart is delighted) as he promised the girl he likes. And even if that's not the case, he'll be really happy to be asked to do something that only he can do. Though he feels foolish of himself, right now, he's feeling superior to Yuji.

Yuji says to Tanaka,

"Well, how about we clear up?"

"Ah, ya. Better reward her for this wonderful meal."

"Don't you people need to study?"

Ogata chuckles, and Satou dampens her mood again,

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"You don't have the right to say that to others, you know."

"What? Don't tell me you have that right!?"

Seeing them squabble like that, Shana, who for some reason is staring into the soup bowl, says in a different volume from what Yoshida did, soft yet clear.

"You just need to choose from everyone except for Ike Hayato and Yoshida Kazumi, right?"

In the end, the remaining five of them decide to choose using janken.

"Uu..."

On the sofa in the Satou residence bar, Margery woke up.

She notices the color of the window. It's black, so it means it should be night. The weak lights at the bar counter are the only ones lighting up this silent room.

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Though she probably slept for a long time, it seems like she's still not sober yet. She slowly lets the fatigued and irritated body get up.

"Water..."

She continues to comb the messy hair with the hairclip removed as she looks at the table in front of the sofa. The water bottle's still placed there, but it's empty.

(Ah--I just took it to mix with wine, and still felt asleep with no water left.)

And she even used up all the ice in the ice bottle beside her. 'Speaking of which, it seems like I just ate up all the ice. Why did I do such a thing?' After cursing at her rampant drinking, she reaches out for the remaining beef kerky.

(...What a fool I am.)

Wouldn't that make me even thirsty? Thinking about this, she still puts the meat into her mouth.

"Humph..."

OF course, it tastes bad as she spits it back out. Her hands fall limp like a corpse as she grabs the rope of the grimoire.

"Water, I want water..."

She tuckes that huge book under her right armpit and stands up, walking gingerly to the door.

"Oi, my low-profile sleeping beauty Margery Daw."

"Shut ya, will ya? My head hurts."

She shuts her partner's mouth up with a vague drunken voice of hers, and at this moment, realizes that something's amiss.

(Oh that's right. My spectacles...? Never mind.)

Though she doesn't have her spectacles on, and her hair's all messy since it's not tied up, it's nothing much. Either way, her mind's working, so she should just get some water.

Marchosias, who's tucked under her armpit, uses the blue sparks to spurts out sighs.

---

(Uu...doesn't matter anyway.)

Besides, she's going to a place which doesn't involve the study group anyway.

The silver basin's lined up, and the tiled floor has water pipes neatly arranged. This is the wide cookhouse of Satou's house. Being alone here, Ogata seems to grumble about something as she washes the plates.

"I'm okay with janken, but why do I have to do this alone..."

Suddenly, she has memories of the place. She remembers the many times when she came here to play together with Tanaka, the water pipes that could only work by turning on all the faucets, the tile that was cut because she dropped the chopper while cutting an Italian sausage, the hard oven that Satou knocked his head into after he tripped and fell. Nothing changed at all.

--Phew..."

Thinking about all these while working, she sighs. At that time, they were innocent, naive and able to get close to each other, and right now, she really yearns for these

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qualities. She continues to wash the high-priced cutlery as she sighs alone.

"Kazumi's amazing...should I try cooking...?"

At this moment, the sliding door to the cookhouse opens.

"Are you there, aunty? Give me some water..."

Their eyes met.

"Huh...?"

"!?"

Seeing Margery, Ogata blushes as her mouth remains open, unable to say anything.

(Oh my.)

Right now, if Marchosias has a hand, he will definitely slap himself on the head. He wanted to remind her just now not for his own sake, but because Margery's badly dressed.

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She's only wearing a large shirt to go with her underwear, and anyone who sees her like this will definitely misunderstand. The beauty whose hair is let down and messy forgets to even put her spectacles on as she looks somewhat dazed.

In all sorts of ways, this is a dangerous signal.

Of course, Ogata's misunderstanding because of her attire, and the plate drops out of her hands. It's a good thing that she's washing on the basin, as the plate doesn't break but instead sinks into the water.

"Ah, yes, is this Satou's...? But he seemed to say that nobody's around..."

As her heart wavers, she doesn't even know what she's saying.

"Hm...? Who are you?"

Margery stares at the unfamiliar girl she's facing in a bewildered manner, but immediately gives up on asking as she slowly walks towards her.

"...Ah."

---

Facing such a bewitching woman (in Ogata's perspective), she finally remembers that she was with Tanaka Eita, and the wavering heart in her now has a firm belief.

(No, I can't possibly be mistaken now.)

She remembers her as the beauty who was on a date with Tanaka Eita (to her, at least) at the open-air Misago Festival.

She remembers that vexing image.

(Why, why is that person here?)

The biggest reason why Ogata Matake confessed to Tanaka Eita was because of this Margery Daw.

(Don, don tell me it's Satou's...but he was with Tanaka at that time.)

At first, Ogata wasn't thinking of confessing to Tanaka Eita during the Misago Festival, and in fact, she didn't even have the guts to ask him out. It was just that she hid all her anxieties within her and went out with her friends.

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At that time, she saw this European lady dating Tanaka (or at least that's what she thought when she saw him that time) and felt angry and regretful. After that, she forced herself to approach him after meeting him at the place out of coincidence, and couldn't help but cry out and even let her emotions run wild by confessing.

If Ogata could calm down and think through what happened, she can realize that the reason why she could summon the courage to confess was all because of this lady, so she should even call her a savior. However, she definitely won't harbor any thanksgiving.

(Wha, what kind of relationship do they have? Don't tell me that they have already...)

The 'fierce rival' is closing in on her. A glamorous look with a high nose bright, elegant-looking long legs, extremely huge eye-catching breasts; no one can be picky about such a figure.

(Ta, Tanaka got fooled by such...such a woman...)

Ogata's fuming that she's at an overwhelming loss in terms of the looks and the figure.

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Either way, she's using the sleepy-eyed, arched-back, messy hair and weak beauty 'at the moment' to motivate herself.

On the other hand, Margery just seems like she came here for something--

(Wa, water...)

She could only think of this. The reason she continues to close in on Ogata is because she remembers that there's a basin behind her, but the girl's standing in front of her and blocking her, not willing to move away.

After a few seconds of silence, when things became an awkward confrontation.

This silence is finally broken by Ogata's nervous voice.

"Ar, are you...Tanaka's..."

"?"

Margery seems to be shocked or something as she stares at the girl who's stammering with stiff lips. She doesn't have an impression on this girl at all, so it's likely that she met her for the first time.

Ogata suddenly shouts,

"MY, MY NAM'ES OGATA MATAKE!!"

"Ah."

The drunk beauty who only wanted to drink water still doesn't realize who this girl is and why she's here.

Seeing his partner being stumped, Marchosias can't help but say with a volume only both of them can hear,

"(Didn't those two say that a few of their friends will be here to study?)"

But right now, instead of answering him, what she wants more is--

(Ku, never mind. Right now, I want...)

"Water..."

"KYAHH!!!"

Facing this beauty with a drunken stench that's closing in, Ogata lets out another scream.

Margery ignores the girl who's being squashed under her as she takes out a glass cup behind her, uses the girl as her support, drinks one glass of water, pours another, and drinks before finally heaving a sigh of relief. It seems like she can think, somewhat,

"Ah--I'm revived..."

"Please~get off me~"

At this moment, Margery finally lets out an 'ah' as she finds the girl who's squashed under her breasts and backs away gingerly.

"So, Jokata-san...what's wrong?"

"MY NAME'S OGATA! OGATA MATAKE!"

"Oh really? Japanese names are so hard to remember..."

While answering, Margery continues to back away, but she still can't stop her feet. At this moment, she feels that there's a cardboard box that's just tall enough for her to sit on and intends to bend down to sit.

"WAH!!!"

However, he butt lands into the empty cardboard box, and with that, her head knocks into the metal rack behind the box. All sorts of pots that were placed on the racks jerk, causing a loud noise in the cookhouse.

"Uu~"

"Ar, are you alright?"

This Flame Haze who's a top-notch killer had her butt dropped into the empty box, and her drunk head got hit hard, nearly knocking her out.

(Really, that's too embarrassing.)

Seeing his partner like this, Marchosias immediately lets out two Jizaiho.

---

A strong flash of light immediately came out of the grimoire, causing Ogata's to shut her eyes.

Using this chance. POW--

Margery's body got covered in thin blue flames that immediately disappeared.

This is a jizaiho that's meant to purify a Flame Haze's body, and to a certain extent, recover a bit of herself--the 'cleansing fire'. Margery uses this to remove her own drunkenness (but her partner may sometimes punish her for drinking too much and not activate it at all.)

And then, having woken up from her own drunkenness , Margery's underable to comprehend what's going on for a while whil she continues to stare blankly at Ogata in front of her.

"..."

And then she realizes that her hair is messy, she's wearing only underwear and a shirt, and her butt is in the empty box.

--Oh my, how did I land here?"

---

Looking rather lost, she buttons her shirt up.

(That's because of what you did. Now, maybe you can put on that 'toca'.)

Completely embarrassed that she's dressed like this and yet unable to argue back, Margery tries to remember through her fuzzy memories.

She looks up slightly and sees Ogata's eyes rolling about as if the flash just now was only her imagination.

(Well, what should we talk about now...)

Thinking about this, Margery intends to get up from the box--

"AH!!!"

A sudden scream that's not from Ogata shocks her and she drops back into the box.

"..."

Now frowning, she turns to look at where the shout came from.

"Good, good evening!"

Standing at where she's glaring at is Yoshida Kazumi, who's bowing politely.

"...Yoshida-san's not here now. Is she helping Ogata-san now?"

Looking at the time on his watch, Ike noted.

It's been 10 minutes since Yoshida said that she wanted to get the 'desserts' Shana brought over.

And even though Satou's house is big, it couldn't have taken her that much time.

Noting the main points that have red lines drawn on them, Satou replies,

"Well, it's a straight path down, so she couldn't have gotten lost."

"If we don't get the cake here now, Shana's going to get angry."

"I won't."

---

Shana looks unhappy as she continues to mark the questions Tanaka passed over.

She only knows that the answer is absolute and that Tanaka's fundamentals are wrong. It's Ike's job to think of the reason why he went wrong and explain it, and it's Shana's role to add on additional points.

Sitting beside them, Yuji puts down his textbook and says,

"I'll go take a look."

And stands up,

"..."

And at this moment, Shana strikes him at the perfect moment behind his knee with her hand to force him to sit down.

"WAH!! What are you doing, Shana!?"

"I'll go look. Yuji, remember all the details I just mentioned."

Shana said in a commanding tone and stands up,

---

"You don't have to be so anxious anyway. It's not like the cake will run away~OW!!!"

Yuji immediately got hammered hard by her on the back of his head.

Standing at the indoor bar counter in Satou's house, Ogata Matake puts the wine glasses and the wine bottles in front of her.

Sitting in front of her, Margery is sitting in front of the counter with the wine glasses and bottles in front of her, making a face-off.

"Heh...so you used this before?"

Seeing Ogata take out the wine glasses and bottles from the bar wine cupboard, Margery asked her. It seems like she's fine with under-agreed drinking as she's treating the other person as a drinking partner, or rather using wine as a way talk.

"I came here a *lot of times* with Tanaka since a long time ago."

---

Ogata emphasized heavily on one part as she answered. However, there's a lie to it. Ever since they became high school students, she started to take part actively in social clubs, and so she started to interact more with girls.

"Of course, I would go to other place as well."

She continued to hold onto, or rather, follow the beauty who managed to get sober after drinking two glasses of water (or at least that's what she sees) and ended up coming over.

"I don't know what's going on, but since I have time, let me hear a few words from you."

Margery chuckles as she sits on a chair beside the counter, but the strange thing is that Yoshida's sitting beside her, being uncomfortable with this place and atmosphere as she shrinks back.

Looking really worried, Yoshida's sweating over her classmate's 'battle'.

"O, Ogata-chan..."

"Don't worry, I know my limit."

---

This is basically an answer that didn't answer the question since it's a jab at Margery.

However, the smile on Margery's face doesn't seem to disappear.

Wearing the rimless glasses, she combed her hair, and is now wearing a cardigan sweater over her white shirt and tight pants. Just these alone is enough to turn a good-for-nothing looking drunkard into a beauty with quite the presence. That party-mode presence of hers wouldn't look out of place even as a frontpage cover girl.

However, this beauty reveals an overwhelming smile that a cover girl can't possibly have as she says,

"Hm...you and Eita...he really didn't do anything, and you say that I took him away. How rude."

Facing Ogata's jab, Margery lets out a counterattack of two heavy cross-punches.

Ogata's legs wobble as she leans on the counter.

Seeing the funny reaction from the girl, MArgery laughs.

---

(Wh, what should I do...?)

Yoshida's extremely worried. Ogata doesn't know this beauty's identity and history, and though she came here to prevent them from quarrelling, the dangerous topic will appear soon.

(Got to find a way to cover it up.)

Of course, Margery won't explain what she just said, as she can't possibly talk about the Flame Hazes.

"Ac, actually, that didn't really mean anything..."

Yoshida manages to advise despite being flabbergasted.

However, she's digging her own grave as Ogata feels somewhat betrayed.

"Kazumi, do you know of this person's relationship with Tanaka?"

"Ah, ye, yes."

Ogata's instincts ae telling her that Yoshida knows the answer, and she presses on.

---

"Who is she?"

"Well, she's..."

"What's her relationship with Tanaka!? Or is it Satou!!?"

"Uu..."

"How did you know about that, Kaz--"

"Alright, that's enough!"

Probably unwilling to see Yoshida suffer like this, Margery finally steps in.

"I'm here, so you don't have to ask her."

Being called out like this, Ogata finally recovers and sees that she nearly caused Yoshida to cry. She frantically bows down to apologize.

"So, sorry, Kazumi, I was too anxious..."

As she made a positive correction on their behavior, Margery starts off,

---

"Well, my name's Margery Daw. Because of work, I asked them to help me find a place, and so I started staying here. After that work assignment was complete, they requested me to stay here, so it's not my problem."

This answer was as smooth-flowing as water that's flowing down a wooden board that's set up, but Ogata continues to ask,

"What kind of work is it that you need to stay in other people's houses?"

"That's a secret. I don't lack funds, but this place is convenient and quiet, and more importatnly, Satou did tell me that I could just drink as much alcohol as I want here."

In the space behind them--in what's supposed to be a room in the indoor bar, there are large wardrobes and sofas inside, empty bottles and half-eaten delivered pizza on the dining table, stockings and a wrinkled carpet on the floor, so one can tell that she's been staying here.

(What's going on? Really...and that Satou, bringing an unknown woman here into his house--)

---

However, Ogata can feel that this strong-looking woman isn't the kind to freeload others. One can tell from her impeccable actions that she's different, and since she's wearing expensive-looking clothes, what she said about work doesn't look like a lie, but it's just that she can't say it out. She can feel the gravity in her words.

(most likely an entrepreneur or something...)

Being only a student, even though she's feeling inferior to a beautiful chairman, she still asks something that's most important to her.

"Then, why is it that even though you have a normal relationship...that, that date at the shrine?"

"What?"

Shocked, Margery's eyes widen at the questioned Ogata bombarded her with.

"WEREN'T YOU BEING ALL TOO FRIENDLY WITH TANAKA ALONE!? BOTH OF YOU WERE TOGETHER! !!"

"O, Ogata-chan..."

---

Unable to comfort her, Yoshida looks completely lost, and standing beside her, Margery doesn't look like she can think of the reason behind the outburst.

(I did go to the shrine, but I didn't do anything that anyone will grumble about, right? And she looks like she's wants to say something--)

(My slow-witted beauty Margery Daw, are you still *drunk*?)

The grimoire that's palced beside her foot says something that others can't hear.

(What do you mean by that?)

(See for yourself.)

Thinking about it, she looks at the girl whose eyes are glaring back hard at her. She can see an anxious feeling on her face.

At this moment, she finally realizes the meaning behind that look.

(Oh, I see.)

---

Understanding that, she lost her smile. Because of a certain fact, she didn't realize it at all as she was thinking of what the girl is being bold about. Actually, if she noticed carefully, she should be able to see the relationship between 'the two of them'.

(...But I didn't even realize it.)

Margery finds the girl cute for putting up such a resistance like that, but right now, she still keeps a calm tone as she waves her hand and says,

"Relax, I don't have that relationship you think of with Eita and Keisaku at all."

This clear and perfect answer made Yoshida, who's beside her, pity those two boys.

Ogata backs away, and then immediately recovers and continues to press on,

"But if you weren't dating--"

"That wasn't a date, and it wasn't just Eita over there, Keisaku was around, wasn't he? didn't you hear?"

"Ah..."

---

Ogata got the basic error in her words pointed out as she couldn't say anything. Speaking of which, Tanaka really did try to explain that Satou was around...

"But, but then, that Tanaka, he was looking happy--"

"Have you been loved by others before?"

"Eh?"

Hearing this sudden question, Ogata is puzzled.

"Why, why must I talk about that..."

Though she intends to throw a temper, she got silenced with a strong glare that doesn't allow any refusals.

She thinks through it, and then stutters out,

"...Most likely, not."

Getting ready to be mocked, the girl stands blankly at the counter, and Margery continues to stare silently with her hand on her cheek, checking out how deep her love is before remarking,

---

"Then, you probably don't know."

This isn't a mockery, but a confirmation to her.

"Let me tell you. It's terrifying to be loved."

The girls who aren't really experienced in love look up in disbelief.

"It's a powerful force that causes people to risk their lives. It's an honest force--that can use all the power to create a delightful feeling--forming a bond between warmth and comfort, tightrope-walking like tension--love, is something that the other person has to feel."

It seems that Margery started to talk to not one person, but two since when.

The girls are engrossed by the realism of the beauty's words in regards to their past days and memories as they continue to listen on.

Margery reveals a beautiful lonely smile.

"However, though I may feel that it's a pity 'as a woman', I'm feeling really happy 'as myself'."

---

But her smile--

"Those two never gave me that feeling, not once. Both of them never fell in love with me, and they never harbored any feelings of them."

What those two did was--

"Those two are two naive. This is completely different from love. This is just complete admiration. Those two are just like children, putting their dreams on others and feeling in awe of that strength."

She finally declared the cruel judgment.

"..."

"..."

This is a cruelty that will make anyone pity them.

And it's a harshness that will make anyone pity them.

The two girls now have a strong respect to this woman

This perfect woman tilts the wine bottle in front of the girls and pours out a transparent wine into the glass.

She then says before she takes a swif and gulps it all down,

"Of course, those two would probably admire a large number of what 'guys are interested about the girls', but it seems that you lack them."

She uses her eyes to compare the girl and Yoshida, and quips,

"If you want Eita, you got to at least reach that size, right?"

Realizing what's she's referring to, Ogata uses both arms to cover her chest and says,

"You, you don't have to worry about this!!"

Though she's blushing furiously, her voice doesn't have the resistance that was present just now.

"Eh? --Ah..."

Yoshida paused for a moment, and realized that she shrunk back.

Treating these girls like a meal, Margery gulps another glass of wine and reveals a little smile that's completely identical to before.

"However, I'm going to stay here. During this time, I will have to accompany them in their childish dreams. Since I caused them to have such dreams, I should bear a little responsibility."

(Shee--shee--! How shocking, isn't it? My extremely kind soul Margery--UOH!!)

Kicking aside the grimoire that's beside her feet, Margery gulps down another shot, and without even looking up at the girl who's staring at her from the other side of the counter, she says,

"It's not easy to follow what I dream of, so they will suffere in the future. So even if it's just Eita, continue to build up your relationship with him and support him. I hate those troublesome things the most."

Ogata spends a second to digest what she just said, tilts her body sideways at the table and declares,

---

"Alright! I will improve my relationship with him!"

'Kukuku' Margery laughed happily and takes up the wine glass, raising it to her line of sight. What's reflected on the glass is a figure of a girl who's feeling relieved about this after being dragged apart.

"You too. If you're going to continue to be so relenting, you're going to get your guy taken away from someone else. Normally, the people who strike first and hard will win."

It seems like she saw through it completely.

Seeing Ogata nod her head in agreement, Yoshida's face is dyed red completely.

She hesitates out of kindness and says,

"Relenting..."

She recalles what she saw.

The life and death of humans of this world of truths and lies--as what she saw were huge and unrealistic, all the fear with regards to everything in reality passes

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throughout her entire body. Being amazed by all the amazing things she sees, she still feels somewhat awkward about what she sees—these feelings intertwine within each other, forming anxiety and self-defeat. She would often wonder, more than being allowed to think about it, what if the person she loves is on the other side?

She says out what she really thinks,

“But I don't know. Is it really alright to do that?”

Margery casually answered this tough question.

“No problems. The world won't be destroyed because of this. You really like him, right?”

“...”

The answer she heard 3 days ago appear in her mind.

(--“The main point is whether you like him or not. It's just that simple, everything else doesn't matter.”--)

Yoshida now understands that, even though she got this answer from Sakai Yuji's mother, Chigusa, who has a completely different viewpoint about this, the answer's the same.

---

Though she got the same answers, the one who really needs to step up is herself.

Thinking about this, she nods her head,

“Yes.”

Even as a spectator, Ogata can feel the intense atmosphere in the conversation, before both of them got cut off.

“Ah, so you're here.”

Shana looks in from the ajar door.

“Everyone else's waiting for you. Hurry up and go back.”

Yoshida hurriedly stands up,

“So, sorry, a lot of things happened.”

Right now, she's having a sense of guilt, and this isn't just directed at Shana. The biggest reason is, whether it's Khamsin, Chigusa or Margery, it feels like she's being

---

helped, or that's what she thinks. Though she's not so noble to demand fair competition, she's feeling uneasy that she's being treated better.

Ogata barely squeezes out a smile and says,

“Ah haha, ya. It's true that a lot of things happened.”

“...”

Shana stares sternly at the 3 people who look like they're giving an invisible guilty presence. Ogata is forcing a smile to cover up, Yoshida is looking apologetic, and Margery's deliberately looking away and whistling.

“Did she talk about anything strange?”

But she doesn't look like she wants to pursue matters further. It seems like she just wants to confirm whether Margery told Ogata about anything related to the crimson realm.

Yoshida feels relaxed as she tries to cover her guilt and asks,

“Mn, nothing.”

During this time, Shana turns to look at Margery from the door, and her attitude seems somewhat weird.

But the beauty who's being stared at seems like she intends to act like she doesn't know anything as she continues to pour wine in and shake her hand at them to shoo them away, prompting them to hurry up and leave.

“Okay okay, that's enough, the terrifying half-pint is here. Hurry up and go back then, Missys.”

Ogata is utterly amazed by this woman that she couldn't even approach as she bows down with much respect,

“We'll be going first then.”

Yoshida gets up from her seat and bows deeply to Margery.

“Same here, really, thank you. I'll do my best.”

Shana stares at the people who're leaving with a suspicious look, and Ogata pushes her from behind as she says,

“Let's go then.”

---

All the of them walk out of the bar like that.

Trying to cover up, Yoshida says to Shana,

“I'll get the cake and juice from the kitchen.”

“?...Hn.”

After the door to the bar closes, the room regains the temporary silence.

In the dimly lit room, Margery looks away from the counter..

The wine bottle and glasses all remain there.

Remembering how the girl looked when she took those things out, she started to laugh.

From the smile, one can feel the loneliness of losing a drinking partner--

“Shee—shee, those two will be really angry if they know that you just gave advice so freely, my cruel teacher Margery Daw?”

Marchosias' mocking voice can be heard from the grimoire at her feet.

This time, Margery didn't kick it away, but plays it with her fingers and smiles,

"Of course, girls are different from guys. Guys will get strongly the more hardships they get, but girls need to be delicately brought up, whether in body or in soul, or else they will wither."

"Haha, you understand it well."

"Mn, really well."

After saying that, Margery kicks the grimoire away.

It's a few hours after they returned back from the study group, and it's now almost nearing midnight now at the Sakai's residence.

On the narrow balcony that's linked to Yuji's room, both Yuji and Shana are standing at the window.

This is a night training that they would do everyday. Though they would normally carry it out after setting up a Fuzetsu, but as there's no special topic today, they're spending the day watching this.

While they're training, Yuji suddenly lets out what sounds like a sigh.

"...Why is it that nothing happened?"

"What do you mean by that?"

Alastor's reply can be heard from the Cocytus that's resting on Shana's chest.

Yuji simply replies with a line,

"I'm talking about what happened today."

The legs that have grown to an unexpectedly long length stretch out onto the balcony floor as he places both hands behind him to support himself. He's still wearing the sports jacket.

"?"

Sitting beside Yuji with her knees cupped together, Shana tilts her head. She's wearing the slightly large nightwear that she normally changes into at the Sakai residence.

Both of them are dressed as per usual.

"If you really want to say it, just say it out."

Alastor lectures him for not explaining himself.

Yuji scratches his head to compile his thoughts.

"Sorry, but I don't really know what to say...oh ya, when everyone met at the roof 3 days ago, when they knew that I'm a 'Mystes'...I was really worried that things would turn for the worst, or rather, I was scared. Yesterday, with Satou, Tanaka, Yoshida-san--"

Yuji said that name smoothly, not even a sense of resistance.

Just that alone is enough to cause a sharp pain within Shana.

(I am here.)

---

Everything related to Yuji would cause her heart to waver. It's like that battle, she was afraid, annoyed.

--When we met, I was worried that such a thing would happen, but everyone had a normal response, they viewed me the same way. Though I'm happy...deep inside, it's really weird. Is this really the pain that I worked so hard to be mentally prepared for yet lost them ?"

"..."

Alastor doesn't answer as he lets Yuji continue on.

"But on the other hand, that time was because we wanted to send Khamsin away...then, if we were at the place, the place where Shana and the rest are at, it does make sense."

(Shana and the rest...?)

The girl starts to feel uncertain about this saying.

"But it's still like this...I really feel like I'm actually living in my daily life, and time just passed by peacefully like that Going to school, meeting my classmates, hearing teachers teach, eating Yoshida-san's bento with Ike,

---

cracking jokes, Ogata-san starting a study group; Everyone just went about with their normal stuff. Nothing changed at all, it's completely the same.”

(--Yuji--)

*Yuji seems to be saying this in a different viewpoint from mine.*

Shana's really unhappy about this thinking of his.

“Of course, I don't wish to be bullied by others, I really wish to live as per normal, but I don't dare to believe that it exists right in front of me. I even felt a chill, I got myself ready to be isolated and treat it as if per normal. But--”

“Yuji, you...”

“Eh?”

Being interrupted out of a sudden. Yuji suddenly turns to look beside him.

Shana, who's sitting when her knees cupped together, is looking forward as she bites her lips. Even anyone who isn't Yuji can sense the pain that appeared on her lips.

---

“What, what's wrong? Sorry, did I say something I shouldn't have said?”

Yuji doesn't know what happened as he just apologized.

Shana shakes her head. The black hair dances in the air, reflecting the light in the night sky. As she showered the moment she reached back at the Sakai's residence, that shampoo smell lofts past the nose.

Yuji is inadvertently mesmerized by the girl in front of him.

But she's a real Flame Haze.

As the swaying silky hair suddenly descends into silence, the expression disappeared from her face as a silent voice answers Yuji's doubts. Her face is still facing forward.

"This so-called everyday life can't be easily broken just because someone knows the truth. Until now, you always proved this point, and right now, you aren't perturbed at all. That's all."

---

Shana's used to using the 2nd-person pronoun when talking to Yuji, so this sounds exceptionally cold.

Alastor heard it, but continues to let her talk on,

"Satou Keisaku, Tanaka Eita, Yoshida Kazumi, they don't have any way to deal with that fact that you're not a human."

She's the only one with this power.

This superiority starts to lure Shana into wanting him for herself.

"They aren't like Flame Hazes or Denizens, they don't have much Power of Existence, and they don't have the power to use the Reiji Maigo. No matter what the truth is , if they can't enter this territory, they can only continue to live on as per habit..."

"As per habit..."

Right now, his life as a human is related to human relationships. As nothing changed even when he thought he grasped onto the hope, he got denied with these merciless words, and Yuji's face turns pale.

---

Despite knowing the change in him, Shana continues to cup her knees together and say,

"But one day."

She stopped.

"--"

Just when Alastor's about to give a word of advice,

"Who's amongst them--"

She uses her own voice to cover over it.

"Soon, you'll feel a little disharmony. You will start to develop different from humans after interacting with us for a long time. Does the 'real Sakai Yuji' exist like this... you'll soon have that kind of thinking. How you lived your life, and their attitude, it will--erase them."

That will hurt Yuji, and will now scar him emotionally.

However, with trembling shoulders, she continues,

"This chill and isolation, it doesn't appear right from the beginning. As you feel today, it's the same daily life,

---

the same scenery, the same friends. The chill and isolation will slowly erode all these away...this will be your life in the future."

As a Flame Haze, as herself, she can only state 'the truth of this world', unlike Yoshida who's able to say it out on emotions.

Because that's her, the 'Flame-Haired Burning-eyes Hunter'.

Yuji understands this more than anyone else.

*'Once I lose myself, he'll even get angry at himself.*

*Thus, I have to ascertain my existence here.*

*To be a powerful Flame Haze that I can be proud of.*

"Yuji."

Having never felt this about herself before she came here, that thirst of existing not just for being a Flame Haze nearly materializes as a voice. She tries to hide it, and says to Yuji, who's getting more and more perspective nowadays.

---

"You're the existence beside me."

"..."

She's standing beside him, yet she can't face the boy straight on. She remains silent, and then mutters to herself,

"...It seems like I haven't learnt my lesson yet. I still wish that I'm a human."

Shana still continues to look forward.

Yuji doesn't look at Shana beside him as he stares in front and says,

"Sorry Shana, Alastor, I recently swore to 'work hard until the day we leave'...but because of Yoshida-san--"

Yuji pauses and intend to choose the appropriate words. This isn't something that should be said to a Flame Haze.

(I can't let Shana hear these words.)

Seeing the boy hesitate, Shana feels annoyed, and more importantly, anxious.)

---

(Idiot...I know about it all.)

But it's because both sides wished for it that he still chooses his words.

--I actually had unrealistic dreams of having 'a happy thing like keeping me here'."

The Mystes boy is seeing the image of his dream in his eyes.

"Always staying in this city, training with Shana every morning, mom calling Alastor irregularly, Ike teaching me, Satou and Tanaka talking about interesting stuff with me, eating Yoshida-san's bento, attending lessons with Ogata-san and the rest, playing with them, buy something on the streets to eat, watch a movie, or just walk together, that kind of a 'dream'."

Dream and dream, there's something that flashed between these two words that vanished with the end of the dialogue. After a blank moment of wishing this dream goodbye, Yuji finally says something that Shana and Alastor would never say for him."

"Actually, I knew that it couldn't possibly happen."

---

Shana sternly nods her head.

She continues to listen to his dreams and understood the importance of it.

But even so, Shana still nods her head.

Shana scolds Yuji as if she's punishing him.

"You liar."

"Mn."

Alastor snorts in agreement.

And Yuji can only smile bitterly at them.

Shana suddenly grabbed Yuji's hand quickly.

"WAH!"

At first, both of them only dared to touch each other on the fingers, and now, Shana's focusing all her strength into the small, gentle and soft hand as she grabs Yuji's hand tightly.

---

"Let's start training. First, you have to trying getting used to exerting the power of existence from within."

Feeling the warmth in Shana's hand, the liar Yuji again answers confidently,

"Mn."

## Interlude 2 - The assault of the general

In the thick fog where there's not a tinge of air to be felt moving, a large ship is docked at a quay. The ship that's like a black wall has scratches of wind and rain pelted all over it for a long time. The ship is big, but there aren't a lot of people on it. There's only a faint light that's set on the quay, dimly showing the figure of a person.

At this moment, a dim light appears near a railing on side of the deck.

It's a mysterious muddy violet flame.

The flame that's shaking up and down is actually from the cigarette of the black figure.

"General."

Zarashi. A figure lands down from above the man who's smoking.

That's a monster that looks like a bird and like a human.

That monster who's kneeling on one knee at the man who's smoking doesn't have a human-like head. The

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chest is protuding out, and though the body's of a humanoid shape, it's covered in beastly fur.

This monster that be considered a birdman opens its eyes and mouth on the chest. It says in a man's voice.

"Perimeter's set up. The enemy hasn't realised that they're surrounded.

Hearing the male voice of the headless bird, the smoker who's called the general laments with some mockery within it,

"Of course. Half of the people sent there are jizaiho specialists anyway. If we get discovered like that, wouldn't the 'strongest ogranization' that old hag Bel Peol's been preaching become a joke?"

Though it's midnight now, the general's still wearing sunglasses. Deep within those pair of sunglasses, the mocking pupils in his eyes can be seen clearly. The tall man is wearing a black suit, and his platinum-colored hair is combed back, and he's radiating off an abnormally large Power of Existence that the birdman can't compare to.

That general asks briefly.

---

"How many times have we let them get away, Dorel Kubelik's Outlaw group?"

"Besides the small fry, throughout these 200 years, 5 times."

The birdman bends forward like he's trying to lower the head that doesn't exist.

"The Treasury and the routes weren't dealt with? I see. No wonder the European Flame Hazes are all alright."

"This is really humiliating...we have no excuses for this."

"Forget about it. It's thanks to you guys inaptness that someone like me can have a firm footing in the organization. If I can only offer my services to those who don't need my help, even this 'thousand changes' Sydonay can only complain about having nothing to do."

Failing to understand what the general meant, the birdman remains silent and bends down even lower.

"Then, let's get started."

Busshh, he spits the cigarette into the sea. One of the three pillars of 'Bal Masque'--the general 'thousand changes' Sydonay raises his right arm to the side.

Suddenly, a wolf's fang-sized gap appears from within his palm, and what slides out from within is a dull-looking object. The length indicates that it can't possibly be hidden in the palm. As the end of this rod-shaped object appears, Sydonay grabs it and then swings it hard, grabbing it with the other hand. 'Swoosh', he hits it hard onto the wooden deck, and there's a large crater that appears even on the metal floor underneath it.

"Oh."

The birdman lets out a cry of amazement as he looks up at the object. That's a spear that's twice as long as Sydonay's height. It's thick and has a large and long blade attached to it.

"That is the Hogu 'Shintetsu Nyo!'...!"

"Is this the first time you're seeing it? This thing's pretty good."

From who knows when, Sydonay's face shows a savage smile. The arm that's holding onto the 'Shintetsu Nyoi' starts to radiate out purple flames.

"Ye, yes! I'll send out the orders to attack--"

"No need."

Sydonay cuts off the birdman's words.

"Stay put here. Same goes for the rest."

"Bu, but..."

Pakipkito, Sydonay says impatiently,

"The reason why I allowed all of you to surround the enemy is to help me clear up the mess and kill off any stragglers that I might have missed. I don't want you people to get in my way, and I don't want to send my soldiers to die in vain. Once the 'Shintetsu Nyoi' is used, I can't go easy."

The general starts to sway and change.

The birdman trembles as he looks up at the general, and then gets down again.

"Yes, please show off as much as you can!"

"Kuku, you people's speech mannerisms are really old-fashioned. When you have time, got watch some TV and learn something."

Sydonay bares his fangs and laughed. That swaying figure of his grow out some bat-like wings behind his back, and while the wings fan up the wind, Sydonay takes an unimaginably heavy step and flies off from the ship./

As he lands, he glides down before deploying those huge bat-like wings.

Under the thick fog, the man who's flying with a spear start to change shape.

The upper body is like an abnormally sturdy tiger, and there's even a horn of a beast on it. Below the knees are sharp claws of an eagle, and the bat wings and snake's tail appear on his back.

---

It looks just like a demon as depicted in ancient texts.

"Oohh...hm?"

The birdman who saw the general leave realizes that something's amiss.

Though Sydonay's body has increased to 3 times the size, it seems like the spear in his hand changed sizes with respect to the body.

"Don't tell me..."

The birdman looks at Sydonay as he flies onto the fog, and it seems that he wasn't seeing things.

The spear 'Shintetsu Nyoi' will change size according to the changes the user has.

As to be expected of the treasure tool the 'Thousand Changes' loves to use, this is the unique ability of the 'Shintetsu Nyoi'.

Sydonay's wielding the spear as he quickly flies through the narrow gap on the quay and into the warehouse. The scenery around the warehouse seem to rewind backwards at a high speed.

---

In front of him, there's an old building that's made of crimson red bricks, and there are lantern-like lights that are hung on both sides of the entrance. Written on that sloppy signboard is the name of the hotel, and in fact, this is a secret base for Flame Hazes to exchange information and supply aid...Outlaw.

This Outlaw group is run by a Flame Haze named Dorel, and the main purpose is to provide information to Flame Hazes, quickly organize them for battles and aid them through funding and other forms of management. To the Denizens in Europe, it is an eyesore.

(So our first step is to ask the force the Flame Hazes to spill out where our fellow Denizens are held...hm...)

Burning with muddy purple flames, Sydonay, while in a wild tiger image, remembers the guideline Bel Peol set for the organization.

Of course, Sydonay himself prefers to get hold of information about young Denizen whereabouts that might be useful to the scouts, however...

(Never mind, forget about it.)

---

Sydonay thoroughly gives up on this idea.

He can't just give up. Since he intends to eliminate them all, he has to focus on this. There's no need to think about other things.

Thinking of this, Sydonay suddenly realizes an action.

(Found out.)

Most likely, a few Flame Hazes decided to attack before he enters the room. Sydonay feels the power continuing to gather. Though the enemies' power varies in strength, they're not to be underestimated if they fight him head on.

However, Sydonay ignores it and bares his fangs.

He starts to gather a large amount of Power of Existence from deep within him.

Suddenly,

Sydonay quickly flies low at high speed and lands on the road facing the hotel. The stone floor that's laid out on the road scatter into sparks continuously before forming a fissure. Stopping--Sydonay uses the recoil.

---

"RROOOOOOAAAAAAAARRR!!!"

And gives off an angry roar while using the 'Shintetsu Nyoi' that was placed behind to stab through violently.

He uses this arm that's at its maximum size.

And the spear that expands accordingly with muddy purple flames.

Just one strike was enough to force a hole through the Outlaw camp.

That old building that's made of red bricks start to expand and explode due to the huge power of the spear and the flames, and the few workers inside were burnt to ash.

"!"

Sydonay senses someone escaping the chaos, and immediately shrinks his arm and spear, deploy his wings and look for the survivor.

"HEHAHAHAHAHA!!! You found out that I came here at the last second, Dorel?"

---

The person who escaped jumped up and landed on the roof.

That's an eagle-nosed little old man with white hair and wrinkles all over his face. His neck is hidden in the extremely formal suit as he faces the terrifying enemy with a painful expression.

This Flame Haze is one of the rare old mens. He's the 'Performer of Depressive Dreams' Dorel Kubelik.

He's the main mastermind behind the activities supporting so many Flame Hazes all over Europe, and battling's not his forte. As a human, he used his personality and management abilities to plan ways of taking down Denizens as an organizer. This is an old Flame Haze with a young mentality.

"Ku--! What's going on!? Sydonay came here alone, with the 'Shintetsu Nyoi' activated!?"

A shrill woman's voice can be heard from the walking stick in Dorel's hand. This walking stick Wünschelrute is a Treasure tool that presents the will of the 'Crimson Lord', 'Colored Forest of Emptiness' Halphas.

---

Below this tag team that resides within one, the muddy purple flames quickly swim away. The trails let out strange lines and continue to burn.

Finally, a rainbow wall forms around them in a half-spherical shape. This is the appearance of the Fuzetsu that separates space.

Before the old Flame Haze tag team can recover, Sydonay has already landed onto the roof of the warehouse with heavy steps.

“Kuku, seems like it’s hard for you to escape, right, you old-yet-young-at-heart guy? Is your caravan and skateboard inside there?”

Outside the Fuzetsu, Dorel can vaguely see the Outlaw base torched.

“DAMN YOU! WHAT ARE YOU SAYING!? I WON’T ALLOW YOU TO INSULT OUR DOREL GROUP!!”

The one who replied Sydonay wasn’t Dorel, but Halphas.

And the contractor Dorel silently stares at Sydonay with sharp-granny eyes.

Hearing Halphas words, Sydonay can't help but laugh.

"That Dorel group of yours is already reduced to ash. Right now, Outlaw has a large amount of money, machinery and information network. These are things that will have bad consequences once destroyed."

Even a Jizaiho can't create money out of thin air ( though a Crimson Lord tried to research on such a possibility, it didn't work thought.)

To a Flame Haze, though it's easy to steal life-saving funds, the downside is easy to see, and that is that fact that unnecessary commotion will be raised. Thus, most Flame Hazes don't like to do this. That's because the investigation against these crimes will get stricter every year, so it's better to not leave as much traces as possible in the human realm. This is a common understanding amongst the Flame Hazes.

Thus, some of the Flame Hazes will create funding groups or join some monetary groups to earn the necessary funds for transport and all other purposes.

---

The Outlaw group that Dorel and a few other partners set up is commonly called the 'Dorel Group', one of the monetary groups out there, and a management group that spreads out to several other areas.

The general of Bal Masque who came here to crush this group chuckles,

"Once I destroy your old nest with overwhelming force before you can even defend, the entire group will lose functionality, It's different from a group that wants revenge. Once this is found out, it's much easier to deal with you, and the battle results will be much better."

"DAMN YOU--!!"

Ignoring the raging walking stick Halphas, Dorel finally says,

"So you have finally carried out a search part? We admit that we pretty much hid ourselves, but we still got found out, and now even the famous Sydonay has come all the way here to finish us off. This is just a warm up before a vast movement from Bal Masque, right? So you want to kill off the Flame Hazes' morale?"

---



The tiger in front of him hides his smile.

“As expected of the Flame Haze who’s famous for his non-combat talents. However, I’m not so generous to give you a gift before you die. All I can say is that you can die for the sake of that old hag of ours.”

Sydonay forces more power through the spear in his hands.

“Dorel!!”

“Halphas. Even if I die now, you mustn’t appear on this world. Once a Crimson Lord who’s contracted appears on this world, all my power will be used up, and you will naturally wither and die. Also, you lack offensive power, so you most likely won’t be able to beat this Sydonay. It’s okay if only I die, but I’ll feel really sad if you die as well.”

After analyzing the surroundings calmly, orange sparks start to flutter around Dorel. Though this is a dying struggle, it is also an unwavering pride of a Flame Haze.

“No--!! DOREL, RUN AWAY!!”

---

Amongst the firedust that's dancing about, Dorel shakes his head and finally says his will.

"It's been 200 years. Up till now, I've been carrying out revenge. After doing my own revenge, I started to help out Flame Hazes take revenge, and continued to build up the organization and spread the method around. Though Sydonay said so, in fact, the Flame Hazes can take revenge for their loved ones much more easily in an organized manner and fight against the enemies on both sides of the world."

As Sydonay smiles bitterly at this, a flame shaped human slowly stands up, and amongst the scattered firedust, these human images continue to multiply. Soon, they become like Dorel. The 'Performer of Depressive Dreams' ability is to create illusions.

The tiger that's covered in muddy purple flames gather all his power and raises the spear.

And then, from the human-shaped illusions all over the place, Dorel can be heard advising Halphas.

"This is all thanks to you, Halphas. Thank you. Please return back."

---

“DOREL—”

The next moment, Halphas feels it.

“HA!”

Sydonay swings the spear that's 3 times as big as normal, hacking the real Dorel that's hidden amongst the illusions neatly in half. The tremendous power that's gathered in the spear exerts even more destruction than the weapon itself and crushes the Crimson Lord Hogu into dust.

KLANG!

In the Fuzetsu, the clear crisp sound of thin glass breaking can be heard.

Amongst these sounds, Halphas can feel the earth tremor.

That's because Halphas acted according to his wishes and didn't appear.

Sydonay spins the spear again and smacks it against the ground. This time, the Fuzetsu was removed at the same time like a signal.

---

As the Outlaw base beside him burns into flames, the night sky is dyed red, and there are people who are either here to watch the show or here to save the fire.

“And that will be the third one.”

The birdman who landed beside Sydonay from who knows when counted the number of missions the general completed.

“Humph.”

With the fire shown on the sunglasses, ‘thousand changes’ Sydonay doesn’t have any special feelings about it, and he just gives a short order.

“Fall back.”

“Affirmative!”

Leaving the burning flames and large amount of rubble behind his mind, the Crimson Lord and his cronies vanish into the dark night sky.

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## Chapter 3 - The person who arrives

It's been 3 days since the end of the torturous end-of-term exams, and now it's finally judgment day before the wonderful summer vacation.

Not fearing the summer sun beating down hard like a fire, the ceremony is held in the cramped and humid school.

In the classrooms that are in dismissal mode, the homeroom teachers are lecturing about all the things that need to be taken note of in a monotonous tone, and the pile of homework that's laid on the table, and so on. They were forced to endure all these before summer vacation arrives, and once the long and laborious ceremony is over, Yuji's group of seven got their papers back, and found that at least their efforts didn't go to waste.

Of course, in terms of a last-minute studying, they did improve their grades, and how much they improved their grades is according to how much knowledge they learnt. Grades are impartial, how much they put in would be how much they would get. This is common logic.

**Status:**  
**Incomplete**

55%  
completed  
(estimated)



Opening up their scripts, the first page shows their overall grades. Shana and Ike got very high grades, Yoshida got a high-medium grade, Yuji got a medium grade, and Satou, Tanaka and Ogata got a low-high grade.

"We-ll, it seemed to be because we started chit-chatting on the second and third days at the last minute. We should have studied hard."

The main protagonist of the study group, Ike, who acted as the teacher for Yuji and the rest, said.

"If I hadn't focused so hard on cooking and helped everyone study..."

These three days, Yoshida had been working hard for everyone and providing them with food. She said so with remorse (ever since the second day started, everyone's been telling her not to use her own money and just use the ingredients in Satou's residences.)

However, Satou, Tanaka and Ogata seem to feel rather satisfied as the participants and say,

"Well, that's good, and either way, at least we don't have to retake our exams."

---

"Uu, yeah. This is the first time I actually looked forward to summer vacation with a relaxed feeling."

We barely got a passing grade. That was close."

The student report book that's to be returned back to the parents also have the teachers' remarks on it, and once the report book is passed to the students, the classroom erupted into exhilaration and agony, delight and moaning.

As for Shana, even though she made a few mistakes that shouldn't be made, at least her grades are rather perfect.

Thus, she's wondering why everyone' making a hoo-rah over this.

"Grades are just a fixed analysis of your exams. Why are you only shocked and happy at this moment?"

Finally able to heave a sigh of belief, Yuji answers Shana's question with a relaxed expression,

"That's because we mostly relied on luck to do this, Shana. If you're to show your exam script to mom, I'm sure she will be happy."

Shana doesn't answer as she turns around to hide her happy expression.

'That person' is quickly moving nearer with hard-soled shoes.

Moving about at a terrifying speed by using a jizaiho and Treasure Tool to hide her presence in this world.

'That person' is heading towards Misaki City.

Yuji and the rest have already discussed where they wanted to go to on the last day of their revision.

The first one to raise an idea is the extremely energetic Ogata.

"After the exams, let's have a party to celebrate all the effort we put in."

It's obvious what her aim is (or rather, what her mission is), but even so, there's no reason for everyone else to protest violently.

"I agree with that too!"

For some reason, Yoshida agreed with Ogata's suggestion with a firm tone.

"That's good. We managed to enjoy Yoshida-san's cooking during these three days anyway."

"We have no objections as well."

After Yoshida said so, Satou and Tanaka replied.

"Me too."

The moment Ike said that, Yuji follows suit,

"Mn, yeah."

As for Shana, even though she said that she wants to 'maintain a masquerade and live in this city', she seemed to have forgotten all about it as she gives an unhappy look. However, with Yuji and the rest staring at her expectantly, she finally agreed with a scowl on her face.

---

As for the schedule, since Ogata couldn't make it during the 3 days of exam break due to club activities, everyone decided to have it tonight.

As for why at night, that's because while everyone was discussing about what to do or what to play or where to play and whatsoever, Yuji said in a rare stuttering voice,

"How about...we play some hanabi?"

Everyone let out a sound of agreement in unison with regards to Yuji's conservative yet decent proposal.

Though there was the grandest hanabi event just a week ago, some people amongst the seven here were involved in some commotion, and some spent the time depressed, so nobody enjoyed that moment.

The 7 people here decide to play with hanabi again.

All of them agree that this is a really attractive idea.

"Alright, leave it to me."

Satou readily takes the task of preparing for this event.

---

"As there will be a lot of loud noises when playing at night, I'll get a place where no one will complain about."

Satou's been highly rated for his ability to organize functions.

But in fact, this is because everyone agreed that 'we should have the event at the quiet shed at Satou's house', but the owner of the house rejected this notion, saying 'why should we have such a rare joyous occasion at my own house? That's boring'. Thus, Satou subconsciously feels that he has to bear some responsibility and thus went about looking for a place. In the end, the place he finally decided on is an unexpectedly good place.

"THE MISAKI SHRINE~?"

After the last class ended, with the 7 of them left in class, Tanaka's loud shout can be heard.

Satou says proudly,

"That's right. Actually, it's near the outskirts of the Misaki Shrine. They're tearing down the old shrine to

make a parking lot. The old buildings were taken down, so there's only the base left. The area's rather wide, so there's no need to worry about a fire."

At this moment, for some reason, Satou suppressed his volume.

--And also, since the shrine management office is nearby, we can call for help if Tanaka gets attacked by Ogata."

"WHA...!?"

Ogata chokes Satou on the neck in a devilish manner.

"Wa~!"

(It seems like she's really on good terms with Tanaka. Does she really hate it that her plan to attack Tanaka Eita was exposed?)

Shana tries to interpret this action through her own instincts, showing a confused look.

Ignoring Shana's puzzled look, Tanaka comes to the rescue,

"Calm, calm down Oga-chan."

"Uu~"

Tanaka forcefully pulls Ogata away and she finally lets go of Satou's throat.

"I, I was just joking. Wouldn't that huge reaction make others suspect you OW IT HURTS!!"

This time, Ike steps in.

"We can't continue on if you guys are like this. Oh ya, wouldn't we get scolded for using that place?"

"Not really. Our Satou clan also has the same roots as the shrine's clan, and besides, I got the permission of the shrine owner."

"Is that so..."

Even the megane Ike has to play along.

It's true that Satou can settle anything properly because of his wide connections. Though he does hate his clan's authority, he would still use it well when necessary. It's hard to tell if he has gotten smarter now.

---

"Now that it's decided, where are we going to gather?"

Satou gives a sly smile,

"At Sakai's house."

He said.

Misaki Shrine is located right in the middle of Misaki City. It's the only place of thick greenery, on Misaki Hill itself. It seems like it doesn't have the steepness of what a hill should have, but in fact, it's because the surrounding buildings are built on the lower slope of the hill that this seemed to be the case. Looking from afar, it does look like a hill.

This Misaki hill is located near the mana river where it often flooded, and still remained even after years of storms and rain as it's full of greenery and lush. Thus, people started to treat this entire hill as a shrine, and it became a place for people to gather their faith. But it's unknown when other gods were brought in as the shrine started to lose its tradition. Right now, the shrine is a place of worship for so many gods that nobody can even remember them all."

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"It's not rare in Japan anyway."

As Ike explained, everyone ended their long trip and arrived at Misaki Hill.

Tanaka looks around at the surrounding scenery,

"The last time I went to the shrine gate was in elementary school."

The road approaching the shrine is extremely wide, and the lush greenery is beside the road, looking like some piece of cloth on it. As there's no one else besides the nearby residents who have their own vehicles. Thus, the crowd can walk about on this wide narow slope, and since this isn't some famous tourist attraction, it's unlikely for them to see anyone walking about here.

The sunset brings a thin layer of gold to the silent scenery.

Ogata, who came here for the first time, can only feel amazed that this street is located just behind her house.

"It feels like I just discovered a new continent."

"Hehehe, keep on talking!"

---

Confirming that he didn't make the wrong decision, Satou's is gleeing that he has the insight to such stuff. He says to the girl beside him who's staring deep into the sunset,

"...Shouldn't be bad eh? Looking at 'the city you're staying in' from this angle."

Hearing Satou say this, Shana turns over and nods her head, saying,

"Yeah, it's beautiful."

"..."

Yoshida stares at that girl's figure, and then turns to look at Yuji.

Like everyone, he's staring at the scenery of Misaki City that's dyed golden by the sunset that's on the gradual slope of the hill. He's not looking at whatever place, just staring at it silently.

"...What's wrong?"

"Eh, nothing."

Without moving, Shana stares at the panicking Yoshida, who's shaking her head violently. However, she immediately turns away.

Right now, the girls are dressed like how they were dressed up in the Misago Festival (on a side note, the guys are dressed rather plainly in contrast, but that's to be expected.)

Shana's wearing the loose-fitting one-piece dress, Yoshida's wearing a long blouse with a pleated skirt over it. Ogata's wearing a sleeveless vest and a working style pair of jeans. Basically, all of them are dressed up according to what their definition of casual wear is.

That's because Satou reminded them,

"The road to Misaki Shrine is extremely steep, so it's better not to wear the yukata like during the Misago Festival."

With the sunset as the backdrop, everyone continues to head down the road with their backs facing Misaki City. Soon, the shrine gate and the lush greenery appear in front of them, and through the entrance, they can see a steep stone staircase that Satou described.

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"That's right. This place really isn't suited for wearing yukatas."

Seeing this, Ike shows that he understands Satou's advice.

"This stone staircase isn't long, but it sure is deep."

Satou chuckles as he leads everyone.

"There'll be a rest stop on the way up there, so we can talk there and wait till night."

"And Sakai's mother prepared stuff for us."

Tanaka nearly flings the large basket in his hand away and barely steadies himself.

"Aunty's so pretty."

Ogata remembers the time when she when received the basket.

Yoshida nods in agreement.

"Mn, ya,, she's really beautiful."

"That's not the case, you know."

Yuji's no longer at the age when he would feel happy about others praising his mother. It seems to have the opposite effect on him as he clumsily shakes his own basket as he climbs up the steps.

Suddenly, Shana grabs his hand.

"WAH! What...?"

"Don't be so clumsy."

"Ah, sorry sorry."

With Shana lecturing him, Yuji frantically uses both hands to carry the basket in front of his chest.

The remaining few people on the stone steps chuckle at this scene. Like what Satou said, the flight of steps isn't long. There are several lanterns hanging on both sides of the stone stairs, and one can see a little platform between 3 steps. Though the stone steps don't have moss growing over them, there are many crooked places, and there are places that were stepped onto, giving a delicate feel.

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Looking up, the trees on both sides intertwine with each other, covering each side with layers. With the highest step covered with the night sky, the stone steps look like a twilight tunnel.

The person is now right outside Misaki City.

This force of destruction looks afar, feeling rather shocked and fearful.

After a while, the traveler disappears.

"Eh, so that means that the twigs of the memorial tree were clipped by you guys?"

The rest point of the Misaki Shrine is located on the side of the road leading to the main building. It's a pavilion that can be seen by climbing up all the steps.

"Hehe, don't spill the beans though, megane. Because Tanaka used too much force."

As per name, this is a place for the shrine worshippers to rest, but it's now night, and nobody else other than the priests will be here.

"That's because you jokingly hung your foot over there. If I knew that, I wouldn't have pushed you from behind anyway."

This rest stop is a simple hut that's newly built. According to Satou, the shrine management would gradually rebuild all the old constructs of the compound, including a huge plaza that's for the public to burn stuff.

"Really, you guys. You really haven't learnt ever since Elementary School."

There are only a few seats and several vending machines in the rest point, and the fresh wooden smell and air-conditioning brings about a nice sense of comfort in this room that's lit with a white light.

"Eh? Ogata-chan studied in the same elementary school as them?"

Normally in this current situation, they should open the windows to enjoy the night breeze, but once they

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open the windows, mosquitoes will swarm in on them, so they can only use an artificial cooler.

"Eh, don't you know, Yoshida-san? These three are all from Higashinaka."

The 7 of them continue to talk on, maintaining this endless conversation, other than one person.

"..."

This girl who maintained her silence for so long had always been closing her eyes these eyes, waiting for a moment when a strong 'enemy' attacks.

After a while, when everyone's juice bottles are almost empty--

"It's going to be dark soon. Let's have something to eat."

Hearing Ike say this, everyone finally noticed that the dark night has already descended through the glass."

"This is the other event today."

Ogata places the large basket right in the middle of the circle.

Seeing the size of the basket, Tanaka narrows the eyes that were already narrow. He asks, sounding like he got some question,

"Speaking of which, why did Yuji's mom prepare our food as well?"

(Don't worry, stay clam.)

The girl who remains silent told herself this as she silently readies herself.

"Anyway, that's the case."

The planner of today's activity, Satou answers Tanaka's question,

"Well, today's event is supposed to be a 'reward for working hard for the exams, and for Yoshida who made such delicious food for us'--"

Everyone else other than Satou heard this long and unorthodox program name for the first time.

---

(Just act like nothing happened.)

The surrounding voices didn't enter the girl's ears as she just waits for the chance."

--reward for her, so we can't just let Yoshida-san make bentos like that. But it won't have much meaning if we just go to a convenience store to buy one. I thought of a barbecue, but that will mean that we need to carry a lot of stuff up the hill, so it'll be too troublesome. And the shrine won't allow us to use any fires other than hanabis, so we can only bring our own bentos."

Satou raised his five fingers as he bend them one by one to confirm these facts.

(Yes, Chigusa just made them out of convenience.)

The girl made an excuse for herself, trying to calm herself down.

"On one hand, Tanaka and Oga-chan's moms hate me; on the other hand, I've never been to Yoshida and Ike's house, so by elimination, this was the only option. In the end, I could only cry and complain about my troubles to the beautiful Miss Chigusa~"

---

Though Yuji's feeling bothered that others would talk about his family members like this, facts are facts. Thus, he says unhappily,

"However, my mom just loves to butt in. Making bentos so early in the morning. She heard that it was an event to reward Yoshida-san, and even asked me what she likes to eat...speaking of which, Yoshida-san, you like dried Ebi, right?"

"Yes, thank you very much!"

Yoshida's voice trembled with delight.

(Don't get agitated, don't get nervous. Just hand it over to him as if it's nothing.)

Ignoring her rival's actions, she looks extremely nervous.

"Hm, I guess we can be contented if there's delicious food available."

Ogata agrees with Ike's words.

"Oh ya, so can I open it now?"

---

(Now's the time!!)

--Ah, ahem."

The girl who remained silent up till now, Shana, coughs softly a few times.

"Shana?"

Casually turning his head about, Yuji is stunned.

He has never seen Shana blush like this before. He would have thought that she's sick if he didn't know that she's a Flame Haze. Everywhere near her neck, including the ears and the neck are all thoroughly red.

"..."

Right now, Shana's thinking of what Chigusa said.

(--"Well Shana, if you give a boy your own hand-made bento"--)

Shana uses Chigusa's words as courage for action, and opens the lock of the basket at an amazing speed. She uses her hand to cover the top of the opened basket and sees what she wants (for added insurance, Shana made a

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marking on the handle of the basket). She then puts her target beside the basket as she grabbed it like an eagle hunting for prey--

(--"It means that you're telling him that you like him."--  
)

She wanted to put it in front of Yuji, but because she made an error in the intention and execution,

"NGAAHH!!?"

"EAT THIS, YUJI!!"



The target object hits Yuji directly on the nose, and there's a 4 second lag.

On the fifth second, Yuji tumbles backwards due to the heavy hit, and couldn't recover for a while.

"~--..."

While everyone is looking on in shock, Yuji finally gets up slowly as he scratches his head, checking that it's Shana who gave him such a hard hit.

"...?"

The thing that gave him such a painful feeling is wrapped in a cute rectangular tanuki-pictured cloth.

Giving a look of disbelief, Yuji holds onto the nose that was hit as he asked,

"...Don't tell me, that's..."

It's not a 'don't tell me', it's a bento no matter how he looks at it.

---

"URUSAI URUSAI URUSAI! STOP YAPPING AND FINISH IT UP!!"

It's a little off-topic now.

(Speaking of which...)

Yuji remembered that he was forcefully dragged by Shana to run after they reached home.

"So she specially gave it to me?...but,..."

Seeing Yuji mutter as he receives the bento, Shana immediately returns to her seat hastily and turns her back on everyone.

Shana's shoulders are trembling, and she's breathing really hard. It seems that she's really nervous and excited

.

"Tha, thank you."

Yuji thanked her, but his mind is in a blank right now. Something shocking happened. It really happened. He felt it. Up till now, he never felt that it could possibly happen.

---

(But, it's Shana.)

She's a Flame Haze.

She's supposed to be just a Flame Haze.

She shouldn't be anything else other than a Flame Haze.

This was what Yuji thought before all these happened. In fact, Shana's using that to represent herself. He even thought that this would be a humiliation to her pride, the 'Flame-haired Burning-Eyed Hunter' Flame Haze who has such a strong pride.

Why did she think this way?

The answer is simple, because she wanted to have a foothold on him. Thus, he would continue to work hard to repay her during battles.

He should have thought that it was a wrong idea.

But right now, she's telling him that there's another side to her.

(--I can--)

---

The lock that's hidden within her finally seems like it got opened

(--I can love her--)

The thoughts on Yuji's mind appears on his face.  
However, before that--

"NO!!"

Yoshida shouted.

(!!)

"THAT'S NOT ALLOWED!!"

"WH, WHAT'S NOT ALLOWED!?"

Having turned her back on everyone, Shana immediately turned around to shout.

But Yoshida didn't back down.

"Bu, but while I and everyone didn't bring a bento, you actually did such a thing!"

"Uu..."

Including Yuji, everyone's watching what can be called a really rare sight.

"...I, I just made, made it out of co, coincidence, just like that, be, because Yuji's, is, is a liar, so..."

Normally, her tone would be cold, arrogant and uncouth. Right now, her head is lowered as she timidly backs away, stuttering while her hands don't seem like they know what to do as they swim about in front of her chest.

For a rare sight, that makes another one for the other person.

"You can't possibly have made a bento even if it's out of coincidence!!"

Even Yoshida, the gentle, kind and sky her, really got up in a rare angry manner. Her hands are now crossed in front of her chest.

"No, well, that's not it, it's just, for some reason...yes, I JUST DIDN'T KNOW WHY I THOUGHT OF MAKING A BENTO!!"

---

Shana got back some of her momentum and tried to find an excuse as she shouted what she thought of without any restraint.

"ALSO, YOU SAID THAT WE'RE EQUAL, RIGH!? SO I CAN MAKE, WELL, ALL SORTS OF THINGS. BUT THIS ISN'T LIKE THAT! I JUST HAND, HANDED THAT BENTO TO HIM!!"

Hypocrisy probably refers to this. However, it created an effect on Yoshida.

It's true that through the actions, what Shana did was just 'like that'.

Just as Shana sees Yoshida somewhat backing down and intends to take advantage of it, Satou steps in,

"Okay okay, stop arguing."

"Calm down, Yoshida-san, it's just a bento."

Ike stood in front of Yoshida to talk her out.

"Even so."

"..."

---

Seeing Yoshida act like a kid trying to fawn for attention with an expression that shows that she's about to cry, Ike starts to get attracted by it. Realising this, he hurriedly reverted back to normal (and he's really unhappy that he was able to do this.)

Finally, as a neutral female, Ogata stands up and lectures the useless boy.

"SAKAI! THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT! GUYS HAVE TO BE MORE STEADFAST!!"

"Eh, but I..."

Hearing the stupid response from the blank Yuji, Ogata finally loses her patience.

"REALLY, I THOUGHT THAT YOU FINALLY STARTED TO MAN UP. YOU'RE JUST ACTING TOUGH!!"

"Oga-chan, that..."

Hearing Tanaka stammer behind her, Ogata cuts off without discrimination.

"Shut up, Tanaka."

---

"Yes..."

"Sakai, do you intend to let this ruin today's event!?"

(What now? I didn't make that bento...)

Yuji tries to find an excuse for himself, but he picks himself up.)

(Ah, mn, that's right. Wouldn't she give me snacks when we're eating lunch together with Yoshida-san. Why, out of a sudden, does it feel like I got confessed to?)

*That fantastical feeling that can't be held back, why is it rushing up into my heart and burning... even if he thinks about it now, he wouldn't be able to understand.*

Of course, this blockhead of a boy Yuji is far too gone to imagine that this is because Shana has feelings for him and he actually accepted it.

"Okay, okay, let's end it like this, okay? Here, have some bento and everything will be solved, okay?"

*Good thing we got another girl here... The useless boys here thought.* Ogata ignores them as she glances at each

---

person. At this moment, they finally nod their heads silently.

Just as everyone takes out the deluxe bentos of sandwiches that's inside the basket.

(Yes, it's just a bento, just a bento...)

Yuji muttered to himself deep inside, trying to minimise the damage as much as possible and not think about anything else. Thinking to comfort Shana, who looks depressed as she looks like she did something wrong, Yuji opens the tanuki lunchbox.

What's inside is a stark contrast to the outside packaging, a completely aluminium lunchbox(she borrowed Yuji's father Kantaro's lunchbox).

"Why, why is it so big?"

Looking different from usual, Shana continued to stare at him with expectations and Yoshida's curls her lips. Yuji trembles as he opens the lunchbox.

"..."

What's in the middle of the lunchbox isn't the rice that's commonly seen in bentos, but a melon bento that's so moist that it's no longer crispy, and beside it, there's something that's wrapped in aluminum foil, some unknown object that's burnt black. There's also another unknown burnt black object, and finally another one. Basically, that's how the bento is like.

Yuji barely moves his stiff face as he shows a smile, saying,

"...I, itadakimasu."

Shana feels a sense of achievement from Yuji's smile and clenches her own fist triumphantly.

'That person' casually searches for the presence of the target while moving forward.

The person passes the bridge and enters the residence area that forms a huge contrast with the high-rise buildings on the opposite side.

The person carefully senses the flow of the target and makes a response.

---

With the feeling of chewed sand in his mouth, Yuji spits out at the floor.

At where he's looking at, Shana finally exclaims,

"UWAH!?"

"Haha, is this the first time you're seeing this?"

Satou is grinning as if he discovered fire.

Right now, he's holding onto a little stick that's emitting greenish flames similar to that of the 'aerial mouse'.

Such a flame lets out a short bright glow in the darkness, and beside him, Ogata and Tanaka are running away from the emitted sparks.

"OI! DON'T BRING THAT THING NEAR ME!!"

"WOAH!?"

And also, there's Yoshida who widened her eyes in shock.

"KYAH!"

Right now, they're playing hanabi at a shady spot that's located down below the flight of stone steps that's located behind the rest point. It's a silent, large place, and the old shrine was removed from that part as there's stones half-buried in dirt.

The surrounding trees are lush and green, and at this place that's surrounded by such large trees, they can only see the lights of the stars and the windows of the outside society. Over here, they can continue to enjoy the lights of the hanabis as much as they want.

"Great. Both of them managed to patch up."

Ike went up to Yuji and said to him.

"Ah, yes."

"Here, good work."

Ike chuckles as he passes a bottle of juice to Yuji.

"Thanks."

After that, Shana, who managed to calm down, and Yoshida, who managed to control her anger, managed to patch up as per normal because Satou and Tanaka were quarreling while eating.

And right now, both of them are even enjoying today's main event—hanabi.

Though they're feeling rather complicated now, they're still playing, and while playing, the wall between them started to disappear. They are friends, after all.

(Friends...?\_

Yuji inadvertently realises that to one of the girls, this is a really unique situation.

(That Shana, she actually made a bento for me...)

Thinking of this, Yuji's head starts to feel hot. He gulps down the bottle of juice to lower his body temperature.

And from afar, Shana sees the black snake-like thing curl about. She frowns and says,

"How disgusting, what is this...?"

---

"Haha, this is a hebi hanabi. Don't you know what that is?"

Seeing Shana being so uncertain, Tanaka couldn't help but laugh out.

"Your studies are so good, Shana, but you don't understand these kinds of things at all."

Ogata's intrigued about that as well as she said that.

"Well, so people are like that."

Satou chipped in, and Yoshida can't help but chuckle,

"Shana-chan, that thing won't move at all. It's okay not to dodge it."

This event that revolves around the bags of hanabi in Satou's hands seem to become an event that revolves around seeing Shana's cute shocked reaction. On a side note, the shrine management had banned all sorts of hanabi that's similar to rockets and parachutes, as they can be fired into the sky and will cause a lot of noises. Otherwise, they could have seen Shana being even more shocked.

---

"Phew, the charred taste in my mouth is finally--"

"Hey, Sakai."

Ike said to Yuji, who's cleaning his mouth with juice.

Yuji didn't detect the serious tone in Ike's words as he casually answers,

"Hm?"

"What did you do to Yoshida-san during the Misago Festival?"

"EH!?"

On hearing that, Yuji nearly dropped the bottle of juice in his hand.

Ike's not looking at Yuji, and he's not forcing Yuji to answer as he just looks at the flame.

"You, and her--"

Right now, Shana is chasing Yoshida as she waves the sparkling stick like an innocent child, and Yoshida's dodging as she laughs.

---

Ike follows Yoshida with his eyes.

"I feel that you two have changed. It's like something deep inside your hearts got filled up."

"..."

"I remember I told you before. I don't know whether I like it or not, and I don't know how."

"...I remember."

Yuji seriously accepts the words of this good friend that he never heard about before.

"Recently, I seem to have a few answers to these emotions. The answer isn't really clear, but I can feel it. I don't really know if I'm anxious or if I'm bothered...it's hard to explain it in words."

Digesting these words like he's listening to a teacher's words, Yuji finally answers,

"Is that so...so there's such a feeling?"

Ike can only force a smile with regards to that sincere yet weird answer,

---

"Thus, let me say this clearly first. I like Yoshida-san."

Though it may seem too late, this is the first time that Ike said this so clearly.

Yuji can only admir Ike for being able to say such things, and thus nods away ambiguously,

"...Well, okay, I get it--OW!!?"

After slapping Yuji hard on the shoulder, Ike grins and says,

"Sakai, this is a declaration of war. Get serious, will you? Oh ya, speaking of which, what did you do to Yoshida-san? I really want to know?"

Yuji is dumbstruck for a while, but finally calms down and seem to answer decisively,

"Actually, it's nothing special...well, actually, it was special...Yoshida-san, she--"

Opposite them, Shana's running over here like a child as she has a lit fuse-like flaming stick in her hand.

No, two people are running over.

---

"OI, THAT'S NOT TO BE HELD IN THE HAND--!!!"

Tanaka's shout can be heard from afar--

"AH!!"

"UWAH!!!"

As Shana shouted, Yuji's vision is completely covered with white hanabi.

"Are, are you alright?"

Seeing this, Yoshida hurriedly rushed over. Tanaka, Ogata and Satou follow suit.

Understanding that the secret talk between both of them is over, Ike again pats Yuji on the shoulder.

"But there won't be any obvious changes. All I can say is that nothing changed at all. Also, I don't like violence, whether in attitude or in action."

"Megane's going to be my enemy...that's scary."

Yuji casually said his true thoughts out, and Ike can only force another smile.

---

'That person' sensed that the target is in the thick forest.

'That person' carefully hides its own presence.

That person is even considering if there's enough power to use in a fight.

The string-shaped firecrackers continue to let out small, short and fantasical sparks.

Shana continues to stare at the orange light that's she's seeing for the first time. Though it's simple, it seems to have a charm that forces her eyes to continue staring at it. She's squatting down, and everyone else is around her.

That's the last stick-shaped hanabi, and the last one for the day.

At that moment, the spark shines brightly into Shana's bright eyes.

That's an ordinary flame that burns differently from other flames.

It gives a sense of finality as the stick-shaped flame slowly burns out a beautiful hanabi.

Shana feels a weird sense of loneliness with regards to that beauty that's about to end.

Most likely, everyone else, inside Yoshida Kazumi would feel this way, Shana thought.

The hanabi created by the flames start to become lesser and lesser.

And then, suddenly, like a tear full of loneliness, it disappears.

And for some reason, silence doesn't come as expected.

The strong summer night wind, coupled with that flora and fauna, brings about a chill that embraces everyone, and then lofts away.

Yuji softly makes a final declaration,

"Well."

Seeing Yuji's calm demeanor, Yoshida finally smiles, and Ike smiles with a different intention.

---

"Ah, it's finally over."

Ogata said in a joking tone.

"Okay, put all the combustible trash here."

Satou brings over a pail and a pair of scissors, prompting Shana to bring the remains of the flames--that aren't flames, over./

"..."

Shana's still mesmerized by the hanabi she saw for the first time. She remembers the beautiful radiant flames that filled her eyes, she starts to feel reluctant about giving up the thing in her hand. After considering for a while, she says,

"Give this to me."

After saying that, she holds tightly onto the thing in her hand.

However, nobody's laughing at her with regards to this.

After a while, Satou finishes with the clearing of the rubbish and returns it to the pail. After saying hello to

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the shrine management, he returns back to everyone and says,

"Sorry to keep everyone waiting. Let's go then, shall we?"

Just when everyone's turning around to walk through the flight of stone steps, Satou calls everyone with a tinge of prepared laughter.

"Oi! Hold it, we're going home by there."

"Eh?"

"There's no road down there, is there?" Ogata and Tanaka look at where Satou was pointing to as they said, and Satou seem to be ready for that as he explains,

"A road is only formed when people walk down it. Down worry, we just need to walk on."

Ike gives a surprised look as he asks,

"Is this a shortcut?"

"Not really. Well, anyway, just listen to me."

---

After walking with Satou for a while, they end up right in the middle of a mud path in the middle of the empty space as it extends down the hill.

Over there, the woods are extremely lush, forming a pitch black space, and light can't be seen.

"Can we really walk down here?"

"The slope's rather gentle, we can get out of the woods easily."

As he says this, Satou starts to walk down. The others can only follow suit.

Yoshida tries to keep herself close to Yuji, and Shana holds onto Yuji's hand. Tanaka and Ogata naturally hold hands, leaving the lonely Ike with a forced smile as he follows them from behind.

Just like that, after walking for a few minutes, the twigs above them suddenly snap.

"--!"

Everyone, including Satou the guide held their breath.

Suddenly, what appears in front of them at the low slope in front of them is the scenery of lights of all the the residents in Misaki City.

Looking down through the large shrine gate that's lying on the slopy hill is where tens of thousands of residents live in, the Misaki City residential area, the black Mana River that extends out, Misaki High that's slumbering in summer vacation, the Misaki Bridge that has traffic all over it, the central business district that never has any night--all these are within in his eyes.

With the privilege of being the one to introduce this wonderful scene, Satou speaks up,

"It's great, isn't it? This is a secret place I found out when I came here to pray with mom and dad."

"Aah..."

"It's beautiful."

Tanaka and Ogata can only praise in awe in an uncreative manner.

"So that's the final show?"

Ike makes the final conclusion.

Suddenly, the scenery in front prompts a certain person to think.

"If I can have a painting of this beautiful memory...I don't think I'll feel lonely once I leave this place."

Yuji muttered.

"!"

Standing beside him, Yoshida is frozen by the meaning behind Yuji's words.

And on the other side, the girl who's holding Yuji's hand, Shana seems ecstatic over the news.

And Ogata, who doesn't know anything at all, asks in surprise,

"Eh, Sakai? You're transferring schools?"

"What!?"

Shocked, Ike stares at Yuji.

---

“No, no no, I don't mean that.”

Yuji frantically tries to cover up what he just said.

“I'm just saying that I may leave this place one day.”

“Don't scare me like that.”

On hearing that, Ike heaves a sigh of relief as if a heavy burden was lifted off him.

Ogata complains to Yuji,

“Stop saying such things that will make others misunderstand, it's deflating! Everyone managed to enjoy themselves. Just thinking about separating, it's not.. isn't that right?”

“Mn, ah, ya, stop saying something like leaving this place.”

Tanaka conceals his true feelings as he said that.

Satou forces a smile as he expresses envy,

“Ya, don't turn this event I prepared into a 'sad farewell'.”

---

“Sorry.”

Yuji smiles at the grumbling Satou...and then turns to look at the beautiful scenery in front of him.”

Yuji narrows his eyes as if he's feeling dizzy, trying to grasp all the scenery, shape, impression, thoughts into his mind,

To create a wonderful memory of Misaki City that he can recall of before he really leaves this place.

For some reason, the girls on both sides of Yuji carry completely opposite feelings as each person holds tightly onto Yuji's hand.

'That person' is finally able to see the target.

'That person' is shocked to see the target in a group, but carefully looks on, waiting for the time to strike.

As the target moves, 'that person' starts to move.

As the paths everyone takes to go home is different, Ike and Yoshida said goodbye to everyone first.

---

Yuji and the rest wanted to send Yoshida home first, but Yoshida politely refused.

“It's okay, my house is close to Ike-kun's.”

Ike, who was entrusted with Yoshida's defenseless trust, and Yuji, who's looking at him, can only force smiles at each other.

After a while, once everyone separated from each other, Ike trudges on with heavy footsteps as he asks Yoshida,

“Well...about what everyone saw on the hill just now...”

“Eh?”

“When you said about Sakai leaving here, did you have an idea of it?”

“!!!Uu, no, it's that really that...”

It seems like Yoshida really can't tell lies.

Though Ike rather believe that the 'one day' is going to be far away, he feels that something's not right when he

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saw her frantic and felt unhappy about it. However, since Yuji deliberately hid it, there must be a reason why he did so, Ike thought. Though Sakai Yuji is a good guy, he's not a fool. Of course, there must be things that will both bother him.

(Don't tell me...)

From the conversation just now, he feel, including Satou and Tanaka that there's a sort of relationship between all of them. *Maybe it's because of this*, Ike deduced. Ike can only lament that he only realized this on the day he told Yuji that 'I like Yoshida-san'.

(Maybe this may touch Yoshida-san's heart due to the timing.)

Of course, Ike can't do such a thing.

It's not because Ike's extremely kind or loves to dwell on what's good and what's bad. It's just that he hates to let his own personal feelings overwhelm everyone's friendship. Since he doesn't want to do so, he can't do so. This is Ike's personality.

(It may not be a good thing to be too refined.)

---

Though Ike can accurately analyse himself and critique himself, he can also feel that he can't change his own personality. Having controlled his impulses so many times, Ike can only feel somewhat helpless.

“Then, why were you so listless after that?”

Ike diverts the topic to force the hesitant Yoshida to speak up. Ike is happy that Yoshida trusts him, and he hopes to gain Yoshida's trust as a listener. This is the complete opposite of the situation just now.

On hearing Ike's words, Yoshida ponders for a while, and finally says,

“I...I once decided that no matter what happened to Sakai-kun, I would still love him.”

Right now, Yoshida doesn't need anyone's suggestion, What she said just now was just to confirm her own determination. Also, she hopes to have someone as her listener. That's because Ike Hayato's the best listener to Yoshida.

“But after hearing what Sakai-kun said, my determination wavered...thinking about what I should do at that time, and thinking that those words have

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turned into reality...gaining and losing, I'm really despicable for being so competitive."

Yoshida starts to mock herself without any explanation.

And Ike feels an endless amount of despair and anxiety, even anger as he heard Yoshida's words, and says,

"In this age, if you consider it in a reality context, it's common to see friends separating. Even if you feel troubled or confused, nobody will be angry and blame you for that."

"?"

Yoshida is shocked at Ike for being different from his usual calm demeanour. The girl who isn't going to just ask others for help now asks the friend she always trusted as a friend as a listener for the first time.

"Ike-kun...are you bothered by something?"

"!!"

Hearing this, Ike is shocked and stops.

---

"Nothing, nothing at all."

He answered without hesitation as he tries to hide it and continues to move forward.

Yoshida wonders if he got angry because she was so meddlesome and hurriedly chases after him.

"So, sorry. Di, did I say...something wrong?"

The girl's gentleness, coupled with the short distance between both of them made it unbearable for Ike.

"No, that's not true. Don't mind, it's not because of you, Yoshida-san."

Seeing the obstinate boy who continues to pile the burden on himself no matter what, Yoshida starts to feel anxious about it.

Both of them continue to walk forward, and for each step they take, they can feel pain in each step of the way. It's because both of them are more intimate with each other than anyone else that they can feel that the distance between every single step is so large, causing a reluctant feeling.

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Yoshida says to her friend with sincerity,

"Is that so? Then...please tell me if you have anything. I may not be able to help, but at least I can listen to you."

Ike, who started to have feelings that surpasses friendship for this girl, hides his true feelings and says,

"Thank you. If I can't solve it on my own, I will talk to you regarding it...no, I will definitely tell you."

Yoshida doesn't understand the meaning behind these words as she immediately answers,

"Mn."

The trio who stay in the east side of Misaki City, Satou, Tanaka and Ogata separated from Yuji and Shana and head down the street of the old residential area.

The noisy streets continue to be illuminated with street lights, yet they are gradually becoming farther away.

"For some reason, I have a feeling that the Misago Festival hasn't ended."

---

Ogata joked.

Tanaka twitches his eyebrows and chides her,

“Don’t say that. Several people were hurt that time.”

“I got it I got it, sorry, okay?”

Ogata grabbed her head as she honestly apologized.

Satou makes fun of them,

“Hahaha, Tanaka-san’s really so old-fashioned.”

All 3 of them are only surrounded by walls and lights, and as they continue to move down the streets of the old residential area, they finally arrived at the cross-junction.

Satou wants to head forward, and Tanaka wants to go onto another road to send Ogata home. The trio decide to say goodbye here.

“I’m sending Oga-chan back then.”

“Okay, then have a good night’s rest.”

---

Satou answered Tanaka, and then smirks as he adds on another sentence,

“Don't get backstabbed by Oga-chan.”

“Idiot, it's the other way around.”

Tanaka sternly corrected, and Ogata, who understood the meaning behind these words, blushes.

“Couldn't you just have said 'I won't be attacked'? Really!”

Seeing both of them start to get closer together for some reason, the organizer for today's event, Satou, starts to gain a huge satisfaction from this. However, he would express this in the form of pranks, for this is Satou's style.

“Haha, better protect your lips well, Oga-chan.”

“Humph. You don't have to worry about that. Tanaka's different from you. He will follow through with what he said. It was the same on the day after the Misago Festival...”

“WAH WAH WHAT!!? DON'T SAY THAT OUT!?”

---

Of course, Satou won't miss that out. He chokes Tanaka's neck from the back with a wrestling move and ask Ogata,

“Eh? What what? What happened that day?”

“Should I say it...?”

Ogata looks like she really wants to say it as she says casually,

“Hehehe, during the Misago Festival, Tanaka looked like he wanted to go off somewhere and told me 'see you tomorrow' before he left—”

“...!”

In that critical situation, Tanaka basically told her a promise. Having realized that, Satou slightly lets go of the hands that are choking Tanaka.

“Wasn't the day after the Misago Festival Saturday? I thought he was joking, but he really came.”

After saying that, Ogata seemed really dlighted.

“My parents disliked you guys because of some things , but even so, Tanaka still came over to my house in broad daylight and told my parents 'we agreed to that yesterday'...there's no need to treat it so seriously.”

“I, I just came by to say hello, nothing else.”

Tanaka continues to defend himself even though he's being held up Satou.

This time, Satou doesn't make fun of them as he continues to maintain the choke on Tanaka and says to Ogata, who seem to feel that Tanaka did that out of integrity,

“Oga-chan...this guy will treat you seriously if you treat him serious. Treasure him well.”

“Eh? What? Why those weird words out of a sudden?”

Hearing Satou saying something decent (to her) for once, Ogata doesn't know what to do.

At this moment, Satou pushes Tanaka to the confused girl.

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“Okay, gotta go bye bye now!”

“WAHH!?”

“KYAAH!!”

As Tanaka tumbles towards Ogata and both of them cry out, Satou starts to run off to his house.

Tanaka, who quickly recovered, sees the back figure of the good friend who's running down the night street, and says something that would most likely make him happy.

“Today was fun!”

“Thank you!”

Hearing Tanaka and Ogata's voices, Satou waves his hand without turning back as he disappeared into the night.

Yuji and Shana are each holding a basket as they walk back to the Sakai's residence.

“Are you still thinking about what happened just now ?”

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Shana looked up at Yuji as she asked.

One can tell that Shana's happy from her large strides and skirt that's flipping about.

"Un, I really don't know whether I should be happy or sad."

Right now, Yuji's showing an expression that's best suits his words.

Before they left, Satou came over to Yuji and apologized.

He was walking in front of Tanaka and Ogata, but came running over to Yuji and says to him,

"Sorry Sakai...I can't be a good guy now. I felt envious when I heard that you were leaving, even though I know how sad you are..."

Saying that, he naturally lowered his head.

Yuji already worried over his identity and the fact that he's going to leave Misaki City several times, thus, he answers Satou naturally,

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"It's alright. Well, actually, I'm the same as well... everyone can't possibly have things going for them. Even a Flame Haze that can use a Jizaiho is the same."

At that time, when she heard that, Shana tried to hide her still angry expression.

Yuji immediately asked the Flame Haze,

"That's what you said, Shana. That's one concept of reducing the effects of isolation from my daily life, right?"

"..."

Shana cursed herself for making things tougher for herself as she remained silent.

She knows that it was cruel and selfish for her to be happy when Yuji said that he was about to leave.

But even though she knows that, she still can't hold back the delight that naturally swelled up in her.

She knows that this is a taboo of a Flame Haze she so highly-esteemed, but she still couldn't hold back this delight.

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Shana's wavering as she's unable to control this strong shake-up within her.

"Yuji."

To her, she's just happy to be with Yuji.

"What is it?"

To her, she's able to gain comfort in the stiff response from Yuji.

"There's no other way now. That's because, you're already far different from before."

Trying to maintain this delight and security, Shana can only think about not handing him over to Yoshida Kazumi as this feeling rises within her.

For some reason, Shana stopped.

Yuji stopped as well. Both of them are standing under the street light in the middle of the night, staring at each other.

"...What is it?"

Shana can no longer hold back these wild emotions.

That's because she's the only one who can answer Yuji's doubt. She's the only one who can understand why a phenomenon like him exists. Thus, it's the correct choice to go with her. Shana tries to rationalise this as an excuse.

"The 'thousand changes' Sydonay's arm that's within Yuji--"

"Shana."

Alastor tries to stop Shana, who's gradually getting excited, but she covered the Cocytus on her chest to prevent him from saying anything. This is the first time Shana actually defied Alastor without thinking.

"...During the Misago Festival, it became one with you. The proof was your will, fusing that sort of power into your body. Right now, your 'existence' became stronger as well."

"Eh--?"

For a moment, Yuji's unable to say anything due to shock. Shana continues, "Right now, Yuji seem to have

---

far surpassed an ordinary Denizen and became a large Power of Existence. You are able to turn 'thousand changes' arm into a part of your power through training, you turned it into your own power and recovered."

"But...I couldn't feel anything at all. Nothing."

Yuji wants to maintain himself right now, and thus tries to argue back.

"That's because up till now, Yuji, you only felt yourself as a human. It's because you didn't gain awareness of a higher level that you only manifested yourself to such an extent."

"..."

'Manifestation'.

That's a term that's only used when both of them are talking about Denizens or Crimson Lords.

Not expecting such a term to be used to describe himself, Yuji's shocked due to the huge impact, numb and unable to move.

---

“Right now, you just need to learn how to recreate that power, the power of your own existence, Sakai Yuji. Once you finish mastering it, you can control your power and even use a jizaiho.”

It seems that Shana finds that it's a terrific thing.

However, to Yuji, that's the confirmation that he's no longer a human, and the finalization that he will have to leave this place with Shana.

Just when Yuji's fearful of this fact, not knowing what to do--

“You have already far surpassed a human.”

Seeing this girl who looked up at him, Yuji can feel a discrepancy from her expression, her presence.

(So I'm a Flame Haze?)

That doesn't seem to be the case.

(Then, what is it?)

Yuji finds this discrepancy familiar.

(Yes, like that time.)

During the Misago Festival, Shana continued to tell him not to go with Yoshida. It was this kind of a feeling.

(But, but...that time...)

Yuji tries to find another reason to lie to himself, but today, the feelings she gave him today caused him to be unable to use it.

(That bento.)

Yuji finds that his mind is in a whirl.

Yuji always existed as a battle partner that Shana trusts, not because of any other reason, but because Shana requested him. Thus, once Shana got out of line as a Flame Haze, he even scolded her angrily. However, even if he did get angry at what Shana did, he never thought of why Shana would do that. No, even if he thinks of it, he would just think of it as a fantasy and laugh it off. As for why, it's naturally because, Shana basically just treated him as a reliable partner on the battlefield.

That's the reason why Yuji was stuck in the maze of muddy-clear emotions.

---

However, the notion was interrupted by that bento today.

Yuji stares at the petite girl in front of him.

She's cute.

He always thought this way about her.

However, even though her felt this way, there's a decisive difference.

'Very cute'.

That's not used to describe a Flame Haze, but an ordinary girl.

A girl who's blushing and staring at him with honest eyes.

(Shana, she, she like...me?)

Shana is facing him not as a Flame Haze, but as an ordinary girl. Even so, Yuji's not angry, for the one who made her like this was he himself.

---

On the street where no one else is walking on, under the street light, both of them forgot the existence of Alastor and continue to stare at each other.

After a while, Yuji asks as if he's trying to confirm,

“Is this really alright, Shana?”

What he's asking is that is it really alright for Shana to show emotions that are unfulfilling for a Flame Haze to him.

Though Yuji didn't really explain it clearly, it seems like Shana completely understood it. She curls up and lowers her head, saying,

“But...”

This can't be helped, right—this girl with a strong sense of duty can't continue on saying such irresponsible stuff, yet Shana feels that deep within her, there's a strong feeling raging within.

Standing in front of Shana, Yuji suddenly feels wobbly.

Shana feels impatient with regards to this Yuji, and thus--

(I'll kiss Yuji.)

She suddenly decided.)

(Make an oath...with Yuji.)

Chigusa once said that kissing each other on the lips is a form of an oath.

(...'that can let the other person get close to me, to hand me over to him. Such an oath is completely different from feelings that family members will have. It's a powerful and uncontrollable feeling, and the determination to show it must be there. So, the other person must be someone you decide to do this to, or else you shouldn't do that, nor should you accept that'--)

This is the first time a vague explanation was given from an educator, but Shana believed every single word. The girl basically treated this as an oath to be together.

Can she let him get close to everything she has? Can she hand herself over to him?

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Though she's afraid, the girl who's burning with love still stepped up bravely.

(I can.)

Unable to control her emotions, she executes what the Denizens and Chigusa said.

Can she make her mind to say out her thoughts.

(I've decided.)

Is Sakai Yuji worth being determined over?

Up till now, during every battle they had, she remembered every single thing Yuji said.

(If it's with Yuji...)

*If it's with Yuji, I can swear to it.*

Such a notion passed Shana's head as she lifts her head up.

Yuji, who's looking at her, look rather weaker, but she can feel that he's different now.

“Yuji.”

“Eh...?”

Shana suddenly grabbed a shocked Yuji on the chest.



“WAH!?”

Yuji got shocked by Shana's unexpected action, and the basket dropped from his hand.

“...”

Shana wanted to confess to him through words, but she felt like a fool the moment she saw the puzzled look on Yuji's face.

(Never mind, I'll confess.)

Shana decided it on her own, and drags Yuji towards her with even more force.

(Through the lips...)

The faces...are closing in.

At that moment...

“!?”

“Ah?”

Suddenly, they feel a large power from the Crimson Realm, and both of them inadvertently turn to look in that direction.

In the night sky that's above them, a large figure attacks with a white body.

“YUJI!!”

“WAH!!”

Shana immediately pushes Yuji away forcefully, and uses this recoil to dodge.

DONG! The person that landed between both of them is a huge being that's over 2m in height. It has a weird puppet-like body.

“I didn't detect its presence at all!!?”

The large being turned to Yuji, and it gives a mysteriously cold stare from the face that's completely covered with a hood.

With the stupid enemy's back facing her, Shana lets out a crimson red explosion from her feet and uses the recoil to jump up high.

As Shana jumped up, her back was covered by the black coat, Yogasa. Her hair and eyes start to scatter firedust. Her hands reach out for the extremely supernatural nodachi 'Nietono no Shana' and swing out horizontally, causing the giant being to be sliced into half.

Just when Shana thinks that it will be over--

The white giant does a backflip and strikes down. It seems that the giant accurately sensed the speed and angle that the blade came slicing in, and using the time, it jumped over like a pole vault and arrives behind Shana.

"!"

The giant is already outside Shana's attacking range.

Using both hands to support itself onto the ground, the white giant attacks Shana's at the head.

Shana again lets out a burst of crimson red flames from below her feet and slams an air-ripping strike onto the giant like a hammer. She's attacking the source of this giant's power, the large legs.

However, the white giant fluidly opens its legs wide and leads the girl to attack the middle. The huge legs curl up and grab the girl on the neck, choking the petite Flame Haze as it slams it at the wall nearby.

"KUAH!!"

Of course, Shana won't just let herself get beaten. Just when the giant's about to use its legs to swing her out, she uses the nodachi to hack deeply into the legs, standing up and readjusting herself.

At this moment--

"..."

Shana senses the thing that floated out of the leg she sliced.

"--"

Firedust.

Sakura-colored firedust.

"--Ah!?"

Shana cried out in shock and delight.

Of course, Shana won't do something stupid like lowering her blade.

This is something she as a trained Flame Haze can't do.

The white giant confirms this and responds,

"Brilliant. It seems like you haven't lost touch ~de arimasu."

"Splendid."

Two voices can be heard from a single body.

However, they're both cold-sounding females.

Suddenly, Yuji sees the white giant scatter like numerous white tape being removed.

Like a jacket whose threads are unwound.

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After removal, sakura-colored firedust scatter all over the place.

In the gentle light, a woman gently lands gracefully like a dancer.

Dressed in a long skirt, white headdress and apron, anyone can tell that she's dressed weirdly as a maid. Right in the midst of her shoulder-length hair is a face that lacks expression.

Seeing this, Shana shouts that person's name in delight

That's one that Yuji never heard before, filled with Shana's happiness.

"WILHELMINA!!"

## Epilogue

The clean-up work in Misaki City is basically to spread lies that people would accept to remove any traces of damages made by the Crimson Denizens. The one leading the charge to clear up is the elite and highly rated Flame Haze 'Manipulator of 10,000 ribbons' Wilhelmina Carmel.

It seemed that this was all Margery's plan.

The moment she was tasked with clearing up, she did demand the neighboring Outlaw branches to 'get me Wilhelmina Carmel'. Luckily for her, she managed to contact Wilhelmina through phone. At that time, Margery seemed to have said this.

"I heard that brat was raised by you, right? Right now, she looks like she's about to sink into one deep hole."

From Margery's words, Wilhelmina realized that something's not right, and is shocked by the many events that happened in Misaki City. She then ran over without thinking, and finally, she detected the trace of the '

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Enpatsu Shakugan no Uchite'. Thinking about whether Shana may stray down the wrong path in the future, she rushed in.

“As I felt that there was something abnormal, I stepped in de arimasu.”

“Emergency evacuation.”

The moment Wilhelmina's words ended, the one who added on is the 'persona' headdress hogu that's on Wilhelmina, expressing the will of the Crimson Lord 'Crown and Sash of Fantasies' Tiamat.

They look at Shana's chest...with a rather cold look.

“Flame of Heavens, why did such a thing happen even with you around?”

“Insufficient supervision.”

Both of them criticized this Crimson Lord mercilessly.

“...No, I understand how you two feel, but a lot of things happened.”

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Alastor argues back with a weak tone in the face of those two's lectures.

Right now, Shana realizes that she did all that with Yuji in front of Alastor, and even Wilhelmina and Tiamat saw them do that. She blushes.

Just when Yuji's staring at the blushing Shana in surprise, an expressionless face suddenly appears in front of him.

“WAH!?”

Just when Yuji jumped back in shock, Wilhelmina looks up and down at this boy like a businessman prospecting something.

And right now, Shana looks like a kid whose prank was found out as she lowers her head uncomfortably and peeks at the situation in front of him.

“Well...”

Yuji doesn't understand what's the reason between this huge difference in emotions Shana's showing, from the delight she showed just now to the insecurity now.

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However, it definitely seems that she knows Shana well, so he wants to ask this woman in front of her.

“About that..”

Just when Yuji hesitates, Wilhelmina and Tiamat cut him off.

“Today's events have nothing to do with the Mystes de arimasu. Please leave.”

“Immediately.”

On hearing their lack of pretense in chasing him off, Yuji turns pale.

Right now, both of them are giving stern looks of refusal at Yuji, and Yuji can tell that he can't even ask a question, let alone resist. There seems to be a force that doesn't allow any refusal, blocking Yuji like a wall, and he can only stand around and watch, not even able to give any suggestion.

"WILHELMINA!!"

Shana's shout is also unable to break through this wall.

---

"From now one, we'll be proceeding with a meeting between Flame Hazes de arimasu."

"People uninvolved, please leave."

Facing the heavy impact of the meaning behind these icy words, Yuji can't say anything, and can only take the basket from Shana.

"Yuji."

"That'll be all for night training."

(I guess I'm showing the same expression as Shana right now.)

Thinking about this, Yuji said this as he looks at Shana who looks like she's about to cry, and turns around as he leaves this Flame Haze meeting.

Seeing the girl who watches that figure move further away, Wilhelmina sighs and then says,

"...Isn't that the Mystes with the 'Reiji Maigo' within him de arimasu?"

"Extremely weak-willed."

---

"Wilhelmina, why, why did you make things difficult for him?"

"Shana."

Alastor lectures the contractor who's getting out of hand with a low tone.

"..."

Wilhelmina feels like the 'Flame-hair burning-eyed hunter' got corrupted ever since she got named, and feels a surge of unreasonable rage (even though she knows that it's unreasonable.)

She starts to analyse the girls that happened to this girl who lived in this urban life.

How gentle.

There's a huge difference from the girl who became the contractor to the great Crimson Lord.

"Maybe--"

Saying this, Wilhelmina is secretly grateful for the advice given by the 'Choshi no Yomite'. She kneels on one leg and faces the cold black eyes of the girl.

"--Yes, this is just ill intent that's not of innocence."

"Reasonable indeed."

As Shana's guardian, Wilhelmina doesn't deny that she has ill intent, but there's a real reason about this.

Realizing this, Shana tries to buck herself up and reaffirm her will as a Flame Haze.

On seeing her action, Wilhelmina nods her head and enters the main point with a flat tone.

"There's another reason why I came here beside to clear up."

"Reiji Maigo."

Hearing what Tiamat said, Alastor muttered.

"...Un."

"Because of several reasons, only a few number of people knew of this de arimasu...during these few years, I continued to research on the extremely dangerous 'Lord' who would appear after a few hundred years de arimasu, and right now, there are a few colleagues who are handling this for me de arimasu."

Even when announcing such an important thing, Wilhelmina said all that in a flat tone.

"Right now, we're investigating if Bal Masque is involved in this de arimasu. However, one day, that person will find out about that Reiji Maigo, and so the current situation is rather delicate de arimasu."

Realizing the meaning behind her words, Shana starts to have a bad premonition about this.

"That 'Lord' who will appear again... don't tell me."

"Yes, that's one of the 'Engaged Link' de arimasu."

"!!"

Shana starts to feel the chill with regards to the rage that's coming at her."

---

"One way you can protect that Mystes is to continue fighting...however..."

Why must she add 'however'?

Hearing this, Shana's premonition becomes fear, and the fear became reality.



"We have a more definitive method that can stop that Crimson Lord and Bal Masque's indecent intentions...I'm here to tell you the method de arimasu."

Shana started to tremble.

"...Wil...helmina..."

"Yes, that method is to destroy the Mystes and transfer the Reigo Maigo de arimasu."

## Interlude 3 - The Prayer of the Priestess

A clear azure blue sky is above here, and the white clouds are below. The mountain top is as snowy clear as ever.

At the mountain top, the girl with a large cap dances above the skies, and amongst the shoulder-length hair there's a smile that's as beautiful as an ice sculpture.

The girl lands without creating any footprints, only letting the pewter staff in her hand stab a small round hole into the snow.

The triangle head of rings that's attached to the pewter staff let out a clear and crisp sound of impact that reverbrates throughout the mountain.

At this moment, the girl frowns.

"..."

The girl finds that there's something unpleasing to her at where she landed.

What's in the aquamarine eyes of the girl is a lifeless rusted rod of a faded flag.

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Within these two hundred years, the girl would see such unpleasant things corrupt this silent holy place every time she arrive at this mountain top. Sometimes, there would even be a large amount of mountaineering equipment that's abandoned by the humans. If the girl would see the mountaineers who came up here, it's likely that she would kill them all, but she can't possibly remain here forever.

"...Disappear."

Trying to at least purify the area, the girl raises her pewter staff.

Clang! Another crisp sound can be heard from the pewter staff.

Suddenly, a strong gust of wind flips the flag up from the base. Most likely, it would land somewhere once the wind stops, but the girl has no interest in that."

After using the wind to patch up that huge hole, the girl finally frowns as she ponders.

She feels that the time of completion has arrived, and thus look up at the sky.

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What enters her eyes in a clear blue firmament that scratches to yard and beyond. If she can get on it, what she would probably see is the black starry sky. The azure blue sky that hides the darkness enters the girl's eyes.

Soon, the girl's small starts to recite.

"--'Master Throne' Hecate will now pray to the leader that's shrouded in darkness--"

This girl who calls herself Hecate is standing on the thick snow on the mountain top, continuing to spin the pewter staff that's much longer than her petite body.

"--Through the use of the 'Trigon', I shall pray for divine blessing--"

The moment she said that, the pewter staff changes, causing the numerous triangular rings on the triangular rings on the triangle head to clash with each other. They break upon impact, forming even more small triangles. Soon, the entire mountain is covered with a glow that's not like a tornado and not like a snowstorm.

Soon, in the midst of that glowing circle, Hecate prays with a forget-thyself look, and suddenly opens her eyes.

---

At this moment, the storm of aquamarine triangles that are of the shape of sand grains stop.

"I pray for the eternal existence of God's blessing..."

A bead of sweat flows down that stiff-looking face.

The glow continues to gather up the triangle that stopped.

"I pray for the eternal existence of God's blessing..."

A second, third bead of sweat rolls down her face and onto the neck.

The little aquamarine triangles seems like it can't maintain still for much longer as they start to tremble, breaking off from the silent force on the triangle.

"I pray for the eternal existence of God's blessing..."

The girl's voice vanishes as if it got sucked far away, and the light in her eyes vanish, sealed in darkness.

The triangle silently unravels. After it breaks open, all the triangles start to link on their ends. These triangles start to gather, and soon forms a large ball that would

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cover the mountain top that pierced through the sky.  
Deep inside, Hecate's eyes seem to lose their glow as they  
remain pitch black.



Suddenly.

A silver dewdrop lands.

Another silver dewdrop lands.

More and more dew forms, each glittering.

It's unknown how it started, but a large amount of silver beads pour in, seemingly trying to fill up the inside of the ball. It's like a 3-dimensional meteor stream of a planetarium.

There doesn't seem to be any impact, whether it's Hecate who's being baptized by dew, or the ball that's covering the mountain. It just looks like it's bathed in the silver glamor.

After a while, the girl lets go of the pewter staff and extends both hands in front of her.

BAM!!

In the Jizaishiki that's woven through the sky, a strong silver flame burns on.

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"--The spell that's born within the eye--"

At this moment, the black objects break.

The silver dew vanish into the sky like steam.

"--And gathers--"

The moment she said this, Hecate's eyes regain their aquamarine glow. She focuses on the jizaishiki that's wrapped around her chest and turns it into a dew that mounts itself onto the pewter staff in the air.

The scenery is now reverted to how it was before the ritual of prayer.

Seeing the silver dew that's on the pewter staff, the girl smiles and says softly,

"Please appear soon..."

The firmament still remains blue, the clouds remain far, and the snow on the mountain top remains thick.

---

Day after day, night after night, the seeds of separation  
are sprouting.

In order to understand each other, to change and the  
bear the fruit of parting.

From now on, the world shall move into the future...